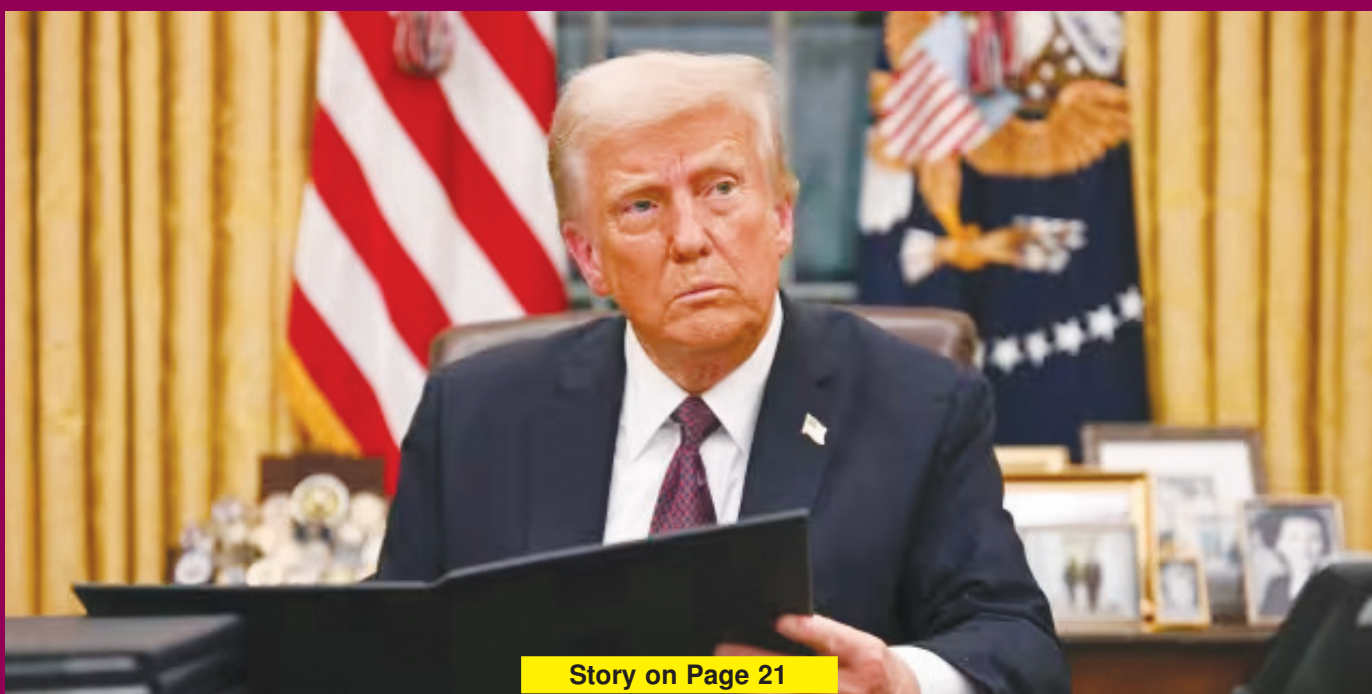


Here comes the Global Trade War

World reels from tariff shock stoked by Trump



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He "Founded Hindu Nation", Then Attempted To Take Over Land In Bolivia



Story on Page 22

**Fraud 2.0 ?
Kerala CM's Daughter
Accused in Rs
2.7 Crore Cyber
Scam**



Story on Page 22

Renowned Businessman and a beloved Community leader, Jasbir Jay Singh is the new President of India Association of Long Island (IALI)



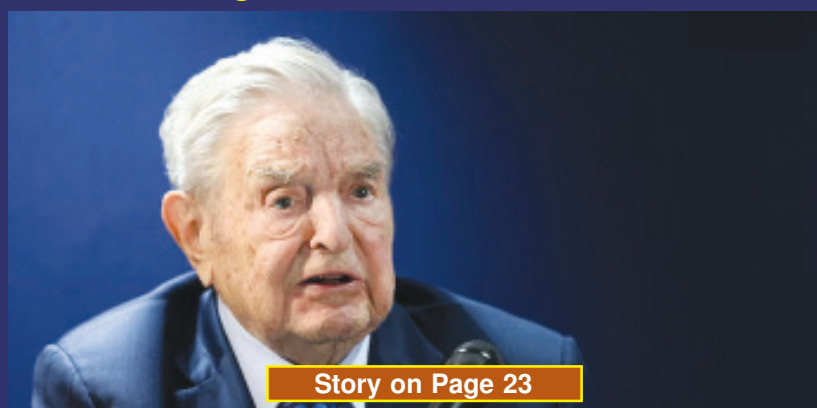
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**FEMA Case:
ED seizes ?
22-cr worth
of immov-
able assets
of Rana
Sugars**



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**ED uncovers George Soros-backed
funding routes to Indian NGOs**



Story on Page 23

Beena Kothari Inaugurated as President of The Association of Indians in America - New York Chapter (AIA-NY)



(By Our Staff Reporter) Recently the Association of Indians in America - New York Chapter (AIA-NY) held a momentous inauguration ceremony, marking the swearing-in of Beena Kothari as the new President, along with the Executive Committee. The event was attended by over 150 distinguished guests, including elected officials, AIA founding members, Board of Trustees, past AIA Presidents, community leaders, members, and media partners. Ceremony Highlights The event commenced with the singing of the American and Indian national anthems by Bina Sabapthy, Jyoti Gupta, and Roopam Maini, followed by a graceful Ganesh Vandana performance by Hamsaasya School of Dance. Harsh Vyas and Jasbir Jay Singh served as emcees for the evening. President Beena Kothari and other dignitaries delivered inspiring speeches, emphasizing the importance of preserving Indian heritage and culture in the USA while promoting integration with mainstream America.

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Renowned Businessman and a beloved Community leader, Jasbir Jay Singh is the new President of India Association of Long Island (IALI)

Jasbir Singh has been known and proven to be the most humble and always ready to serve, leader of the community. He can be trusted to be there, when community need him.



(By Sharanjit Singh Thind) Long Island, New York- Long Island's storied community organization India Association of Long Island (IALI) has a new president, Jasbir Jay Singh. And there is a new leadership team in place. IALI's New leadership team was sworn oath of office recently, in Long Island. The event was well attended by a large number of elected and appointed officials, community leaders as well as members of the Indian American community. Theodore Roosevelt Executive and Legislative Building in Mineola, Nassau County served as the venue where Jasbir Jay Singh and his team were sworn in during an oath-taking ceremony.

Unopposed Election

What makes Jasbir Singh's presidency remarkable is that he has been elected unopposed. All other nominees withdrew their candidacies in recognition of Jasbir Singh

contributions to the community and IALI. As always, Jasbir Singh and his team will serve a one-year term and will oversee several initiatives to support the Indian-American community in Long Island. Jasbir Singh has succeeded Pardeep Tandon, who was last the president of the organization.

In his speech, Singh thanked the community for their support and emphasized his commitment to service. "I want to thank all of you for your trust and support. I recognize the immense responsibility that comes with this role and am dedicated to serving each member of our community. I also want to recognize the pillars of the IALI. Our purpose is Seva (service), not to rule. I aim to make you all proud, and I hope that, by the end of this year, everyone will look back and say that it was a successful year for IALI," Singh said.

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Indian medical student in Kazakhstan dies of heart attack after workout, dinner



(Sai Bureau) - Over 200 Indian passengers have been stranded for more than 16 hours at Turkey's Diyarbakir Airport after a Mumbai-bound Virgin Atlantic flight from London made an emergency landing due to a medical emergency, according to reports by News18. The flight landed at an airport that was unsuitable for handling the aircraft. During the landing, the passengers were told that the flight sustained some technical glitches.

"The emergency landing was made as one passenger had a panic attack. The airport in Turkey is not efficient enough to handle the aircraft," a passenger told CNN News18.

The Indian embassy in Turkey replied to a post on X saying that they are in continuous contact with the Diyarbakir Airport authorities and coordinating to take care of stranded passengers. The stranded passengers remained unclear about their onward journey from



Turkey as the airliner has not officially announced any alternative arrangements.

The passengers took to X to express their grievances.

According to some users, there is not enough food and accommodation for the passengers. Internet services are also limited or unavailable making it difficult for the passengers to communicate with their families and seek

assistance.

Another user highlighted the dire conditions at the airport with reportedly a single toilet for all the passengers.

Virgin Atlantic airlines have responded to a number of grievances apologising for the inconvenience and assuring that they exploring all possible options to ensure the passengers' flight to Mumbai at the earliest.

(Sai Bureau) - Utkarsh Sharma, a medical student from Rajasthan, died of a sudden heart attack in Kazakhstan where he was pursuing his MBBS degree. On the day of the incident, Utkarsh, a native of Rajasthan's Alwar, was having a normal day - going to the gym, talking to his family and having dinner with his friends. However, after returning home from his post-dinner walk, he suddenly fell unwell. His friends rushed him to a hospital, where he was declared

dead. Utkarsh, son of a homeopathic doctor, was studying at Simkent University. A national and state-level athlete, Utkarsh excelled both in sports and in academics. According to his family, he had consistently topped his class and won several medals in sporting events. Two members of Utkarsh's family have already reached Kazakhstan, where the Indian Embassy is handling all the paperwork to assist the family in bringing back the body.

When he last spoke with his

Former Mohawk Executive Sentenced to Prison

(Sai Bureau)- Jana Kanyadan, the former Global Chief Information Officer of Mohawk Industries, Inc. ("Mohawk"), has been sentenced to more than seven years in federal prison for defrauding Mohawk.

"Kanyadan held a position of authority as a C-suite executive at Mohawk and abused his fiduciary duty by stealing from the company that trusted him," said Acting U.S. Attorney Richard S. Moultrie, Jr. "His sentence is a reasonable one that reflects the seriousness of his criminal conduct."

"The defendant stole money that should have gone to his employer," said FBI Atlanta Special Agent in Charge Paul Brown. "We will continue to investigate and hold accountable anyone who attempts to scam their employer out of funds." According to Acting U.S. Attorney Moultrie, the indictment, and other information presented in court: Kanyadan was Mohawk's Global Chief Information Officer, responsible for Information Technology ("IT") services and decisions. In 2019,

Mohawk began a large, multi-year IT project and outsourced work for the project to IT consulting firms. Kanyadan secretly organized and controlled a Georgia company, Meta Technology Platforms, LLC ("Meta Tech"), and used his position at Mohawk to retain Meta Tech as a Mohawk vendor and divert Mohawk's outsourced IT consulting work to Meta Tech.

Between approximately May 7, 2022, and October 2, 2022, Meta Tech submitted invoices to Mohawk totaling approximately \$3,016,011.40. But these invoices did not disclose Kanyadan's relationship to Meta Tech. Moreover, the invoices charged Mohawk for services that had not actually been performed and for software that had not actually been provided. The invoices also charged Mohawk inflated hourly rates that Kanyadan approved on Mohawk's behalf. Based on the fraudulent invoices, Mohawk paid Meta Tech approximately \$1,857,741.40, in total, with approximately \$820,577.40 of that amount arising from fraud.

Jana Kanyadan, 54, of Marietta, Georgia, was sentenced to seven years, six months in prison to be followed by three years of supervised release. Kanyadan was also ordered to pay a \$250,000 fine and \$985,166.66 in restitution. Kanyadan pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud

conspiracy and seven counts of wire fraud on November 1, 2024. This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Samir Kaushal and former Assistant U.S. Attorney Tal C. Chaiken prosecuted the case.

For further information please

contact the U.S. Attorney's Public Affairs Office at USAGAN.PressEmails@usdoj.gov or (404) 581-6280. The Internet address for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is <http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga>.

Atlanta VA Doctor Sentenced for Sexually Assaulting a Female Veteran Patient

(Sai Bureau)- Rajesh Motibhai Patel has been sentenced to two years in federal prison for violating his patient's constitutional right to bodily integrity while acting under color of law and for the offense of abusive sexual contact. "Patel used his position of trust as a VA physician to sexually assault his female veteran patient who had honorably served our country," said Acting U.S. Attorney Richard S. Moultrie, Jr. "His crimes were an egregious breach of that trust and an abuse of his power. This sentence prevents Patel from causing future harm to veterans who seek care from the VA." "This sentence holds Dr. Patel accountable for the vile acts he committed while serving as a VA physician," said Special Agent in Charge David Spilker with the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General's Southeast Field Office. "VA employees are entrusted with keeping our nation's veterans safe while receiving care. Acts of violence against veterans in VA facilities are reprehensible and

erodes that trust. The VA OIG commends the dedicated prosecutors at the U.S. Attorney's Office for their efforts in this case." According to Acting U.S. Attorney Moultrie, the charges, and other information presented in court: Rajesh Motibhai Patel, a physician at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, was convicted of sexually assaulting a female veteran patient during what should have been a routine medical exam in January 2020. During the exam, Patel unlawfully touched the victim's body, including her breast and vaginal area, in ways that violated her consent and for no legitimate medical purpose. Rajesh Motibhai Patel, 69, of Lilburn, Ga., was sentenced to two years in prison to be followed by 15 years of supervised release. Patel is prohibited from practicing medicine while on supervised release. Patel was found guilty by a jury on November 5, 2024, of violating his patient's constitutional right to bodily integrity while acting under color of law and of the offense of abusive sexual contact.

Supreme Court holds Telangana Chief Secretary accountable for tree felling

(News Agency)-The Supreme Court took suo motu cognisance of the large-scale felling of trees in the Kancha Gachibowli area near the University of Hyderabad, making Telangana's Chief Secretary personally accountable for the government's actions. Expressing deep concern, the court halted all activities in the area, except for the protection of existing trees, and warned that non-compliance would lead to strict consequences.

A report submitted by the Registrar (Judicial) of the Telangana High Court showed extensive deforestation. The Supreme Court, after reviewing the findings, questioned the urgency behind the removal of trees and sought explanations from the state government on whether proper environmental clearances had been obtained.

The court specifically demanded answers on whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) certificate was issued and if the requisite permission from forest authorities was secured before proceeding with such large-scale destruction. "What was the compelling urgency to undertake these activities?"



the court asked, emphasising that the presence of peacocks and other wildlife in the area indicated it was a forested habitat.

Photographic evidence submitted to the court showed vast tracts of land cleared, with heavy machinery deployed over nearly 100 acres. The court's directive was clear: until further orders, all activity in the area must cease, and failure to comply would lead to the Chief Secretary being held personally liable.

In a striking remark, the court cautioned

the Chief Secretary, stating, "If you want to enjoy state hospitality, one can't help it," hinting at potential legal repercussions for non-compliance.

PREVIOUSLY IN COURT, DURING HEARING

The Telangana government, represented by senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, earlier in the day, maintained that the land in question was not a forest and asserted that no further deforestation was taking place. "There is no forest there at all," Singhvi

stated.

When pressed by the court on the removal of trees, the state's counsel responded that only shrubs were being cleared.

EARTH MOVERS, POLICE DEPLOYMENT TO FELL TREES

The issue first emerged when students and environmental activists raised concerns over the sudden tree felling over the weekend. Their protests and outcry brought the matter into the legal spotlight, prompting judicial intervention. Reports presented to the court also revealed that a lake existed near the deforested area, further intensifying concerns about ecological damage.

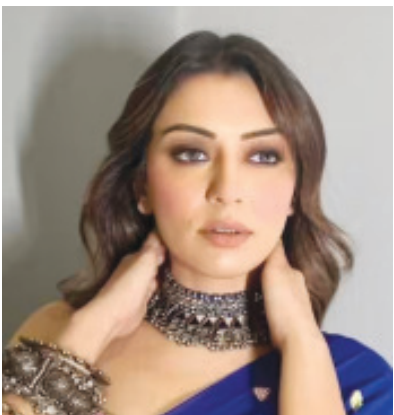
The amicus curiae informed the Supreme Court that the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) was already looking into the matter and would need to file a report explaining the reasons behind the deforestation. The court acknowledged this but stressed the immediate priority was to halt further environmental damage. "That's there, but we need to stop these activities first," it stated firmly.

Actor Hansika Motwani seeks quashing of FIR by sister-in-law

(News Agency)-Actor Hansika Motwani has approached the Bombay High Court seeking the quashing of an FIR registered by her sister-in-law, Muskan Nancy James, against her and her mother. The Bombay High Court on Thursday issued a notice as a bench of Justices Sarang Kotwal and SM Modak heard Motwani's plea, filed on March 24.

James, who is a television actor, married Prashant Motwani, Hansika's brother, in 2020, and has reportedly been living separately from him since 2022.

In her complaint, she accused Prashant Motwani of domestic violence, which she claims led to her developing Bell's Palsy, a condition causing partial facial paralysis. She also alleged that Hansika and her mother interfered in her marriage, contributing to its breakdown. The FIR alleged that Hansika demanded expensive watches, exotic fruits, and dry fruits as gifts during the Roka and



wedding ceremonies. It also claimed that James was pressured to sell her flat and pay Rs 20 lakh for a wedding venue in Udaipur.

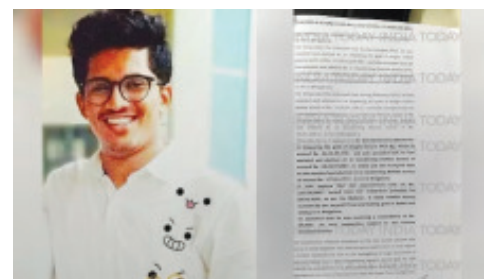
James filed the FIR under sections 498-A (cruelty against a woman), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace), 506 (criminal intimidation), and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code.

Motwani, in her plea, denied all allegations and stated that the discord between her brother and James had been ongoing since 2021 and was resolved in 2022 through mutual divorce discussions.

She further alleged that James shared details of the FIR with the media and "tried to defame" her and her mother, who also manages her work. She also pointed out that she got married in 2022, the same year her brother and James separated, and now lives with her husband. Motwani had been granted pre-arrest bail by the Mumbai Sessions Court.

Remand copy exposes Rs 40 crore hawala racket in Ranya Rao gold smuggling case

(News Agency)-Sahil Jain, the third accused in the Ranya Rao gold smuggling case, was found deeply involved in a large-scale hawala money laundering and gold smuggling operation. India Today exclusively accessed his remand copy, which



revealed that Jain played a key role in facilitating multiple illegal transactions, assisting Kannada actor Ranya Rao in smuggling and disposing of significant amounts of gold while also transferring large sums of hawala money to Dubai.

According to the remand copy, Jain was involved in several high-value transactions, and allegedly received a commission of Rs 55,000 for each of them. In January 2025, he facilitated the transfer of Rs 30.34 lakh in hawala money to Ranya Rao in Bengaluru. The same month, he also helped dispose of 14.568 kg of smuggled gold worth over

Rs 11.55 crore and arranged the transfer of Rs 11 crore in hawala money to Dubai. Additionally, another Rs 55 lakh in hawala funds was sent to Rao in the same month.

In February 2025, Jain further enabled the disposal of 13.433 kg of gold valued at Rs 11.80 crore. He was also involved in transferring Rs 11.25 crore in hawala money to Dubai and another Rs 55.81 lakh to Rao in Bengaluru.

The total transactions uncovered so far include the disposal of 49.6 kg of gold worth Rs 40.13 crore. The amount transferred through hawala networks includes Rs 38.39 crore to Dubai

and Rs 1.73 crore to Ranya Rao. Authorities had seized Rs 2.67 crore in unaccounted cash from Rao's residence on March 4, which is suspected to be the proceeds from these smuggling activities.

Investigators have also recovered crucial evidence from two mobile phones and a laptop belonging to Jain, which are expected to further establish his involvement in the smuggling and money laundering network.

The Special Court for Economic Offences has sent Jain to judicial custody until April 7.

What Donald Trump's 27% reciprocal tariff means for India

The 27% reciprocal tariff imposed by US President Donald Trump is a big blow to India's exports, affecting multiple industries. Here's what it means for the Indian economy and also a look at the key sectors at risk.

(News Agency) - US President Donald Trump has delivered a major trade blow to India, imposing a steep 27% reciprocal tariff that could rattle the country's economy. Announced during his 'Liberation Day' address, the move comes as a setback for New Delhi, which had been hoping for tariff concessions rather than new trade barriers.

Instead, all Indian goods entering the US will now attract a minimum 27% levy, beginning April 9, leaving businesses scrambling to assess the damage.

While Trump called Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "great friend", he claimed India has been charging exorbitant tariffs on American goods while the US has been lenient for decades. "They (India) are charging us 52%, and we charge almost nothing for years and years and decades," Trump said in his speech, making it clear that the new tariff structure is meant to level the playing field.

The US trade deficit with India stands at \$46 billion, and Trump has made it clear that these tariffs will remain until



this so-called 'threat' is resolved.

IMPACT ON INDIA

For India, the reciprocal tariffs could become a major headache. This is because several key sectors will be hit hard, impacting revenues of many companies, ranging from small firms to big conglomerates.

Reports suggest that India is considering slashing tariffs on \$23 billion worth of

US imports, including gems, jewellery, pharmaceuticals, and auto parts, in a bid to soften the blow. But as the situation stands, no deal has been finalised yet.

Ankur Sharma, Market Analyst, VT Market, said, "The announcement of reciprocal tariffs by President Donald Trump on India, Japan, and other nations is a significant development

in global trade, particularly for emerging economies like India." "These tariffs, aimed at counteracting high import duties imposed by these countries on US goods, will have both short-term and long-term implications for India's economy, trade relations, and currency markets."

However, Sanjay Nayar, President, Assocham, argued that the tariff plan announced by Donald Trump will impact India less in comparison to other countries.

"Tariffs unveiled by President Trump last night would bring a major realignment in global trade and manufacturing value chains. "India has been placed somewhere in the middle of the tariff rates at 27%, which need to be assessed for real impact," said Nayar.

"Net-net, it appears India's export competitiveness to the US market stands far less impacted on a relative basis. "Yet our industry should make concerted efforts to increase export efficiency and value addition to mitigate the impact of these tariffs," he said.

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Carefully examining implications, in talks with US: India on Trump's tariffs

The statement by the Finance Ministry further revealed that discussions are underway between Indian and US trade teams to finalise a mutually beneficial, multi-sectoral Bilateral Trade Agreement.

between Indian and US trade teams to finalise a mutually beneficial, multi-sectoral Bilateral Trade Agreement. "These negotiations encompass a broad range of issues, including supply chain integration, investment growth, and technology transfers," the statement said. The US imposed reciprocal tariffs of 27 per cent on India. The new tariffs announced by US President Donald Trump include a universal 10% duty on all imports into the US starting from April 5, with an additional 17% to be applied from April 10. These tariffs are part of a broader trade

policy targeting multiple countries, including India. The press release further read, "The US President has issued an Executive Order on reciprocal tariffs, imposing additional ad-valorem duties ranging from 10% to 50% on imports from all trading partners. The baseline duty of 10% will take effect from April 5, 2025, while the remaining country-specific additional ad-valorem duties will be effective from April 9, 2025. According to Annex I of the Executive Order, the additional duty on Indian imports has been set at 27%." Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's

Office (PMO) called for a high-level meeting on Thursday to assess Trump's tariff order. The Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister chaired the high-level meeting. Senior officials from the Commerce Ministry, NITI Aayog, DPIIT, and other departments were also present in the meeting. On the other hand, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said, "For (Donald) Trump, it's America first but for Modi, it's India first. We are assessing the impact of reciprocal tariffs imposed by the US," news agency PTI reported.

(News Agency)- In its first official response to US President Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs on India, the Department of Commerce said on Thursday that it is carefully examining the implications of the measures and announcements made by Trump.

"The Department of Commerce is engaging with all stakeholders, including Indian industry representatives and exporters, to

gather feedback on their assessment of the tariffs and analyse the situation. Keeping in view the vision of Viksit Bharat, the department is also studying potential opportunities that may arise due to this shift in US trade policy," said the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in a press release.

The statement by the Finance Ministry further revealed that discussions are underway

Chief Justice, Supreme Court judges to declare assets to public amid cash row

(News Agency)- In a move aimed at enhancing judicial transparency, 30 sitting judges of the Supreme Court have agreed to publicly disclose their assets by publishing them on the court's official website. The decision was taken at a full court meeting on April 1 and will also apply to future

Delhi High Court judge Yashwant Varma following a fire incident. He was transferred to the Allahabad High Court following the controversy. However, the Supreme Court later clarified that his transfer wasn't related to the cash discovery row.

Previously, Supreme Court judges were required to declare their assets to the CJI as per a 1997 resolution. However, while a 2009 decision allowed for the voluntary publication of these declarations on the court's website, not all judges opted to do so. With this latest resolution, the Supreme Court has collectively decided to make asset disclosures publicly



judges. This marks a significant shift from previous practice, where asset declarations were mandatory only to the Chief Justice of India (CJI) but optional for public disclosure. However, the official resolution has not yet been uploaded.

The move comes in the wake of growing concerns over opacity in the judiciary, especially after a controversy surrounding the alleged discovery of burnt wads of cash at the residence of

accessible, reinforcing its commitment to accountability. Among the judges who have already submitted their asset declarations are Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna, Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai, Justice BV Nagarathna, Justice Vikram Nath, and Justice JK Maheshwari. The full set of declarations will be uploaded to the Supreme Court's website, with specific modalities for publication to be finalised in due course

It happens only in Kerala: BJP's surprise stance on Empuraan row



(News Agency)-The statements from senior leaders Rajeev Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) unit in Kerala has taken a measured but surprising stance in the controversy over the Malayalam film L2: Empuraan, a political thriller starring Mohanlal and directed by Prithviraj Sukumaran. This even as the Organiser, the mouthpiece of the RSS -- the BJP's ideological parent -- has taken a critical stand against the movie. The BJP's tone is also surprising given that one of the reasons for the controversy was the reference to the 2002 Gujarat riots, an issue that the party is sensitive to. The BJP's response, including the suspension of a local leader who sought a legal ban of the film and

statements from senior leaders Rajeev Chandrasekhar and Union Minister Suresh Gopi, suggested that the party's state unit has exercised restraint and caution in its response to the row. While the Organiser attacked the film, calling it "anti-Bharat and anti-Hindu", the BJP held that "the film should be viewed as a film". Following the outrage from several right-wing quarters, the makers voluntarily made 24 cuts, yet RSS's organiser claimed the film still had "anti-Hindu undertones". Despite this, the BJP's measured stand and its refusal to fully align with the outrage, calling for a ban, suggested it could only happen in Kerala. But why in Kerala?

Democrats' deference to Biden was a disaster. They still haven't learned their lesson

Joe Biden's insistence on running for re-election was certainly disastrous. It kept credible contenders out of the Democratic presidential primaries and prevented the selection of a nominee who had gained momentum in the winnowing process. Even after his stunningly feeble debate performance on 27 June last year, Biden took several weeks before finally opting out of the race. That left Kamala Harris a mere 107 days between the launch of her campaign and election day. Ample evidence shows that the Biden team was riddled with obstinate denial and misrepresentation aimed at the public. But tales of tragic egomania in high places can take us only so far. What's essential is to scrutinize how – and why – the Democratic party, its leaders and its prominent supporters enabled Biden and his inner circle to get away with such momentous stonewalling for so long.

Democrats in Congress, with few exceptions, refused to jump off the Biden 2024 bandwagon until the debate disaster. Similar enabling also came from state party chairs and Democratic governors. Likewise, a wide range of party-allied organizations toed the Biden party line. Meanwhile, many activists took on the role of spectators, if not cheerleaders for another Biden campaign, in an unfolding tragedy of vast proportions.

A common denominator was fear. Fear of being accused of disloyalty to the Democratic president. Fear of being ostracized by fellow Democrats or denounced by anti-Trump commentators. Fear of being accused of weakening the party by pointing out Biden's evident frailty. Fear of damaging personal ambitions or future access to halls of power. And on and on.

The silence and compliance helped Biden to coast toward renomination. Yet by midway through his term, polling numbers and increasingly shaky public behavior were clear signals that he would be a weak candidate. Support from working-class voters, the young, and people of color drastically eroded.

Notably, leading progressives in Congress assisted Biden in fending off a serious primary challenge. Representative Pramila Jayapal, then chair of the congressional Progressive caucus, made a very early endorsement. "I never thought I would say this, but I believe he should run for another term and finish this agenda we laid out," she said in November 2022. Senator Bernie Sanders endorsed Biden in April 2023. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez endorsed him three months later. Polls routinely showed that most Democratic voters did not want Biden to run again. But party leaders were on autopilot, choosing discretion over valor, benefitting their relations with the

White House but undermining the party's prospects of retaining it – as is now painfully and undeniably clear.

A few weeks ago, speaking at a Harvard Kennedy School forum, Jayapal said: "I do think had the president just served one term, he would have gone out a hero, he would have passed the torch, he would have been celebrated for his accomplishments, we would have had a really strong Democratic primary with a lot of good candidates, and then we would have had the full election season to fight it out and to actually get somebody who could win."

Now, an open question is whether crucial lessons have been learned and will be heeded. At stake is the capacity of the Democratic party to defeat Trumpist forces in the midterm elections next year and in 2028.

The outlook is not good. A grim reality is that the Democratic party and its loyalists have developed an enduring corrosive culture – which had everything to do with the insistence on continuing to fuel the faulty Biden 2024 locomotive as it dragged the party toward a calamitous defeat.

I am not writing from a vantage point of hindsight alone. In November 2022, days after the midterm elections, my colleagues and I at the progressive non-profit RootsAction launched the Don't Run Joe campaign (renamed Step Aside Joe when Biden announced his candidacy the following spring). During the next 20 months, not one other sizable national organization was willing to push for Biden to forego a re-election bid.

We began in New Hampshire, the longtime first-in-the-country presidential primary state. (Biden had finished fifth with only 8.4% of the vote in the 2020 Democratic primary there. For 2024, he demoted New Hampshire to make South Carolina first.) On 9 November 2022, our kickoff digital ads reached Democrats across New Hampshire. Within days, upwards of 2,000 Democratic voters in the state had signed a Don't Run Joe petition, conveying this message: "We cannot risk losing in 2024. We shouldn't gamble on Joe Biden's low approval rating." That was the gist of our messaging that continued for more than a year and a half via online advertising, email blasts, social media, news releases, media interviews, mass texting to Democratic voters, leafleting at state party conventions and TV ads in several key states and Washington DC. A mobile Don't Run Joe billboard circled the Capitol and White House as well as the site of a Democratic National Committee meeting.

By Norman Solomon

US Tariffs, A Reaction To Chinese Trade Manipulation, Will Lead To Dumping In India

US President Donald J Trump's decision on April 2, 2025, to declare a national emergency, imposing reciprocal tariffs to address unfair trade practices, will not just reshape global trade and supply chains but also have an impact on manufacturing sectors across the world. Beginning April 5, 2025, the US will impose a baseline tariff of 10 per cent on goods from all countries, followed by individualised reciprocal tariffs effective April 9, 2025, targeting countries with substantial trade deficits, notably China.

This tariff tirade is a direct response to nearly three decades of China's exploitative trade behaviour, characterised by market manipulation, unfair subsidies, technology theft, and protectionist policies, undermining free trade principles and prompting retaliatory measures from traditionally free-trade-advocating nations like the United States. This will lead to a shift of Chinese exports from the US to other countries and will lead to massive dumping not only by China but also by other countries into Indian markets. China has evaded tariffs in the past by going through FTA nations as jump points for its exports. Chinese imports into India came via Singapore. Now, these FTA nations will become conduits for surreptitious Chinese dumping. Historically, Brazil and India have implemented tariffs for various reasons, ranging from protecting domestic industries to balancing trade deficits. India's high tariffs on passenger vehicles—up to 70 per cent compared to America's 2.5 per cent—originated to prevent cheap vehicle imports from Malaysia, South Korea, and China from overwhelming local markets. American automobiles have historically

struggled to penetrate the Indian market due to perceptions about reliability, fuel efficiency, and compatibility with Indian consumer preferences, even when produced domestically.

Brazil's 18 per cent tariff on ethanol, significantly higher than America's 2.5 per cent, is designed to protect its robust domestic biofuel sector, which is critical for national energy security and agriculture. Similarly, China's tariffs and non-monetary barriers stem from its broader economic strategy to boost exports, maintain employment, and protect its fragile governance structure. The effects have been profound, with China's manufacturing dominance contributing to a US trade deficit that displaced millions of American jobs.

China's misuse of global trade norms has significantly contributed to the current situation, compelling even traditionally pro-free trade nations like the United States to impose protective tariffs. China has consistently exploited World Trade Organization (WTO) rules by maintaining high barriers to foreign competition, heavily subsidising its domestic industries, and aggressively exporting surplus production at artificially low prices. For example, China's steel and aluminium industries have been heavily subsidised, enabling them to dominate global markets by selling products below fair market value, severely harming producers in countries including the US and India.

China's frequent disregard for intellectual property rights and forced technology transfers have further strained global trade relationships. China has historically insisted on joint venture (JV) partnerships as a precondition for multinational companies entering its market.

By K Yatish Rajawat



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India And Trump: The Two Election Villains That Have Shook Up Canada



Harsh V. Pant, Vivek Mishra

There has never been a moment in Canadian politics when a domestic election hinged so heavily on a single external factor. US President Donald Trump's dabble on issues of trade, tariff and sovereignty has converged in Ottawa to fuel a national backlash against Washington. Trump's threats against Canada have resulted in the consolidation of a nationalistic, even patriotic, sentiment across the country, leading to a boycott of travel to America and its products at home. Last week, Canadians gathered in an apolitical 'Elbows Up' rally in Toronto to show solidarity

against Trump, a movement that has become a leitmotif for resistance against any American pressure.

Trump's Threats May Be Counterproductive

Canada faces a national election on April 28. But interestingly, in less than a month, the poll numbers have changed rapidly. The Liberal party, at 42%, has pushed slightly ahead in the latest poll numbers, just surpassing the Conservative party, which is at 37%. The latter, in turn, which had remained ahead of the Liberals for most of the past few months, witnessed a fortune reversal owing to two factors: a change in

the leadership of the Liberal party with Mark Carney, and Trump's threats, which galvanised a pan-national sentimental consolidation. Trump's threats have thrown the domestic equation between political parties within Canada in disarray. It has not only given the Liberal party some unforeseen advantages but has also complicated how the rest of the parties present their own various agendas. Most starkly, both the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party (NDP) have been compelled to appear united in their political stance with the Liberal Party in dealing with Trump as an external threat. Pierre Poilievre, the Conservative leader, has been unable to get ahead of Carney. Similarly, Jagmeet Singh, the NDP leader, has also found it difficult to dissociate his party from the Trumpian threat. These developments have catapulted Carney, the leader of the Liberal Party, to the top of the polls at the moment. What they have also done is make Trump and the US the most important subject in the campaign, eclipsing most

domestic issues facing the country.

The Call With Carney

However, a lot could change in the coming days given the unpredictability in Washington. Trump has toned down his rhetoric after a recent call with Mark Carney, in which the latter promised to begin comprehensive negotiations on a new economic and security relationship. Trump did not push back at Carney with either claims of sovereignty or swipes about why Canada should become the 51st state of the US. In fact, Carney described his phone call with Trump as 'cordial'. This has led both the Conservative Party and the NDP to press for releasing more details of the grand bargain. Meanwhile, a high pitch from Washington has proved counterproductive for Trump, leading to the Liberal Party's growing political consolidation in Canada.

Nonetheless, even after having got some breathing space from Trump, Canada is waiting with bated breath for April 2, when the

US President has promised to introduce a slew of tariffs to match other countries. He has called it a 'Liberation Day' for America. Already, the US has imposed 25% tariffs on Canadian goods and threatened 10% duties on energy exports from Canada. An estimated 25% tariff on cars and car parts coming into the US, which will go in force on April 2, could have severe repercussions for the Canadian economy: to illustrate, auto parts worth more than \$300 million cross the bridge connecting Ontario and Detroit on a daily basis.

What The Numbers Indicate

A key factor in the upcoming election will be how other parties will fare in the mix. The NDP's estimated seat tally, as per a poll by The Economist, has dipped from 18 in the first week of January this year to nine by the end of March. The Bloc Québécois (BQ) has also apparently slipped marginally since January this year. Simultaneously, the Liberal Party's rise is expected to cut into the other parties.

1.7 Trillion: Why Investors Are Betting Big On US Despite Recession Fears



By Syed Zubair Ahmed

Despite loud whispers of a slowdown—or even a potential recession—and despite President Donald Trump's now-chaotic tariff tantrums, the US is gaining big in one key area that isn't being talked about much: attracting capital. A staggering \$1.7 trillion in foreign and domestic investment commitments, made in less than three months, underlines long-term confidence in the world's biggest economy.

When companies like Apple and

TSMC, and countries such as Saudi Arabia, bet on the American economy, they don't do it on a whim: they do it because they see long-term profitability.

Trump's pugilist-like tariff jabs may be earning him more adversaries than he bargained for, but he has been demonstrating his knack for convincing countries and corporations to invest big in the US economy to maintain its economic edge. Amid the doom and gloom about a potential US recession, one cannot overlook

the sheer gravitational pull of its market—and indeed, the president's personal pull.

For Trump, this heavy influx of investment should be seen as a strategic counter to recession fears. Infrastructure projects, high-tech manufacturing and AI development may act as a buffer against economic turbulence in the medium to long term. If these investments materialise as promised, they could stabilise growth and reinforce America's position as the world's leading innovation hub.

Billion-Dollar Promises

Between January 20—when Donald Trump took the oath for a second time—and the end of March, three major investment commitments stood out:

Saudi Arabia pledged a massive \$600 billion investment in the US over the next four years, with Trump hinting he might push that figure to \$1 trillion. He called Saudi

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman a "fantastic guy" who might just oblige. Typically, the announcement by the Saudis remained vague on details.

Apple has committed a staggering \$500 billion over four years, aiming to create 20,000 jobs and establish a new factory in Houston to produce AI-driven server infrastructure.

The trio of OpenAI, Oracle and SoftBank have pledged \$500 billion for a project dubbed Stargate, designed to supercharge America's AI infrastructure. To emphasise: half a trillion dollars in investment is aimed at keeping the US ahead in the race for AI dominance over China and others. Then there are other, much smaller, but significant investment commitments:

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC) is pledging \$100 billion in the US. Trump himself announced the

news at the White House alongside TSMC's CEO, marking a major step in America's effort to reclaim dominance in semiconductor production. This new commitment adds to the \$65 billion already pledged for manufacturing facilities in Arizona, bringing TSMC's total US investment to \$165 billion.

Eli Lilly is investing \$27 billion to build four new pharmaceutical manufacturing plants, expected to generate 3,000 high-skilled jobs and employ 10,000 construction workers.

yundai Motor Group has announced plans to invest \$21 billion in the US between 2025 and 2028 to drive manufacturing growth

Smart Focus

Trump's push to incentivise investment—particularly in critical sectors such as semiconductors and AI—aligns with his broader geopolitical strategy.

Does Indian Judiciary Need to Be Reformed?

By JAG MOHAN THAKEN -INDIA

Referring to the recent incidents in the Judiciary, why Member of Indian Parliament Raghav Chadha stated – “The Temple of Justice Will Be Strengthened Only When the Judiciary is Reformed”? Why he emphasized the need for transparency in the collegium system, suggesting a point-based merit system for the appointment of judges? Why MP Raghav Chadha suggested introducing a mandatory cooling off period for judges opting for post-retirement government appointments? Why he stressed the need for reforms that strengthen the judiciary and maintain public trust in the system?

A statement released from the office of Mr. Chadha to the media states that raising concerns over recent incidents in the judiciary, MP Raghav Chadha on Tuesday questioned the government in Rajya Sabha, highlighting the urgent need for judicial reforms. In his address, he emphasized that the people of India regard the judiciary as a temple of justice, believing that when they seek justice, they will receive it. He stated, “Just as it is said that there may be delays in divine justice but never injustice, the same belief exists for our



judiciary – that while justice may take time, injustice will not prevail.”

He acknowledged that the judiciary has historically strengthened public trust, but recent events have raised concerns that must be addressed through reforms.

The release adds that MP Chadha argued that just as reforms have taken place in elections, policing, education, and healthcare, similar improvements are essential in the judiciary. He asserted, “Reforms should aim to

strengthen the judiciary, not weaken it.” In this context, he raised two key issues: the process of appointing judges and the practice of appointing retired judges to government positions. Chadha advocated for transparency in Judicial Appointments.

MP Chadha pointed out the long-standing criticisms of the collegium system, which have been highlighted by multiple Law Commission reports and legal experts. He recalled the earlier push for the National Judicial

Appointments Commission (NJAC) and stressed that it is now time for the collegium system to undergo self-reform and restructuring.

“The collegium system has been criticized for its lack of transparency and public oversight. To address these shortcomings, an independent and transparent selection process should be established, ensuring that judicial appointments are based on seniority, merit, and integrity,” he stated.

Chadha further proposed adopting a point-based system for judicial appointments, similar to the process for designating senior advocates. The Supreme Court introduced a structured, merit-based evaluation for appointing senior advocates, assigning points based on years of practice, pro bono cases, and reported judgments. Chadha suggested that implementing a similar transparent, point-based system for judicial appointments would enhance public confidence in the process.

M P Chadha suggested introducing of mandatory cooling off period for judges opting for post-retirement government appointments. He also raised concerns over the trend of appointing retired judges to administrative or executive positions in the government.

India's Neighbours Rush to Contain Damage as Trump Levies Steep Tariffs

India's neighbours are scrambling to respond after US President Donald Trump imposed steep reciprocal tariffs, threatening key exports from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. With rates as high as 44%, analysts warn of major disruptions, particularly in textiles, as governments rush to mitigate the fallout. Trump has announced a 26% reciprocal tariff on India.

“This is one of the most important days... in American history; it's our Declaration of Economic Independence. For years, hard-working American citizens were forced to sit on the sidelines... But now it's our time to prosper,” Trump said while announcing the tariffs.

New tariff could disrupt Pakistan's trade by slowing down its exports to US

A 29% reciprocal tariff has been imposed on the import of goods from Pakistan, India's immediate neighbour.

Analysts maintained that these new tariffs could end up disrupting Pakistan's trade by slowing down its exports in the US market. Mustafa Pasha, Executive Director and Chief Investment Officer at Lakson Investments Limited, said that the imposition of tariffs is basically a tax on American consumers, reducing their purchasing power and lowering demand for imports.

“If the demand for Pakistani goods falls, it will be a negative for the country,” Pasha told Business Recorder.

The US is among Pakistan's largest trading partners, and experts noted that Pakistan's exports are largely dominated by textiles, which could be among the most affected areas.

During the first seven months of FY2025, exports to the US totalled \$3.6 billion, accounting for 19% of Pakistan's total exports. Of this, 79% (\$2.8 billion) consisted of textile and apparel products. On a post on social media, he noted that “Pakistan will hold a cost advantage over Vietnam (17%), Indonesia (3%), Cambodia (20%), China (25%) and Bangladesh (8%)”.

“Conversely, Pakistan will face a competitive disadvantage of 3% compared to India, 19% when compared with Turkey, and 6% compared to Jordan Egypt and most Central American countries,” he added.

Ali Hasanain, associate professor of economics at LUMS, told Dawn newspaper that “America is one of Pakistan's most important trade partners, and the one with which we run the largest trade surpluses”, adding that nearly a fifth of the country's exports were destined for the US.

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The Dragon And The Elephant Must Dance

By Sanjay Bhattacharyya

The border skirmishes in Galwan in 2020 led to the death of soldiers for the first time in several decades and seriously affected India-China bilateral ties. India conveyed that normal relations were not possible when the borders faced aggression, while China viewed it from the context of overall bilateral relations. The stalemate continued for four years till an understanding was reached to disengage forces. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping met on the margins of the BRICS summit in Kazan, signalling a return to the path of rapprochement. The challenge for India and China, two ancient civilisations seeking economic and strategic adjustments in modern times, was how to craft a relationship that while minimising the possibility of conflict, could take advantage of opportunities for cooperation and manage the competition that is natural for growing powers.

The India-China border has been relatively peaceful since the end of the war in 1962. Both countries attached priority to economic growth. To avoid miscalculation on the border, India and China signed bilateral agreements on maintenance of peace and tranquility, confidence-building measures and guiding principles to address the outstanding boundary question. It is noteworthy that even during the

recent skirmishes, which saw “grey zone” conflict, neither side allowed the situation to escalate to a full-blown war. Both remained committed to dialogue and understood that the opposing side could not be contained. Political will and trust would be necessary to maintain peace across the Himalayas.

An Asian Century

As modern nations, both have risen as powers at the heart of geoeconomic and geopolitical shifts. Today, China is the second largest economy, while India will soon be the third largest, besides being the two most populous countries. The future provides an opportunity to shape an emerging Asian century and for transformation in global governance that is representative and inclusive.

Since 1990, bilateral trade has grown from a mere \$50 million to over \$100 billion. Imports of cheap Chinese goods have fed value chains and infrastructure projects in India but have also weakened domestic industry, while India's exports, primarily raw materials, have been sluggish, leading to a trade imbalance. Bilateral investments have not grown in a similar manner.

The India-China Joint Study Group report highlighted the benefits of cooperation but also pointed out the complementary nature of the two economies. This has inhibited

participation in bilateral or regional free trade agreements. Post-Galwan export restrictions and investment wariness by China, the scrutiny of Chinese investments by India and travel restrictions imposed by both sides confirmed that economic ties have been affected by a trust deficit. What India Brings To The Table

Yet, the synergy of economic cooperation has grown stronger. China remains a global manufacturing hub with prowess in technology and finance, despite economic slowdown and derisking by developed countries. Meanwhile, India's buoyant economy has grown more attractive for foreign investment, technology and resilient supply chains. China needs India's markets, just as India needs to diversify economic engagement.

China's Belt and Road Initiative has helped infrastructure projects in developing countries, but many recipients remain wary of unviable projects and unsustainable debt burden. By contrast, India's modest development assistance, focused on capacity building, has earned goodwill and consolidated its standing as a net security provider and voice of the Global South.

China's assertive diplomacy and territorial claims have raised concerns among its neighbours. Some of those neighbours have looked to India and the Indo-Pacific as a balancing force

as they seek diplomatic space for a free, transparent and rule-based order. Can The Two Co-Exist?

India and China have differing priorities on global governance. At the United Nations, where China is a permanent member of the Security Council and India seeks an appropriate role, there is competition for strategic space. China seeks a larger role on the economic agenda but prefers the status quo on political and strategic issues. This contrasts with India's efforts to reform the multilateral system and bring the Global South to the high table of global governance. In strategic engagement, the divergence can expand as the two grow in stature. India's objective to build partnerships in a multipolar world contrasts with China's quest for global leadership.

After its spectacular rise to major power status, China has used assertive diplomacy to fill a power vacuum and test its hard power capabilities. On the other hand, India's rise, founded on democratic traditions and economic growth, provides an alternative model of inclusive global governance. In the twenty-first century, the Indian narrative of “two tigers find space in the forest” provides a cooperative and harmonious model for both Asia and the global community, and specifically for India and China as they seek to strike a balance between cooperation and competition.

Trump Just Changed The Very Meaning Of Tariffs



AFP

By Deepanshu Mohan

"My fellow Americans, this is Liberation Day, waiting for a long time. April 2, 2025, will forever be remembered as the day American industry was reborn, the day America's destiny was reclaimed and the day that we began to make America wealthy again." These were the words of American President Donald J. Trump as he announced a string of reciprocal tariffs for countries, shaking up the global trade framework. The tariffs, he said, were in response to longstanding unfair trade practices by both friendly and unfriendly nations alike.

The effects of America's 'Liberation Day' are only just starting to be seen. Markets in Asia are already tumbling. Gold prices have surged to a record high, approaching \$3,200/oz as investors rush to hedge against economic uncertainty. The US President's weaponisation of tariff regulations to reorient production, investment and distributive supply chains can end up overhauling trade relations between nations across regions.

A Tough Road For India

With respect to India, the newly imposed 26% duty on exports is likely to disrupt trade and rattle financial markets in both countries in the short to medium term. A recent report estimated that if the US imposed a broad country-level tariff of 25% on Indian imports, India's GDP could take a \$31-billion hit. This figure may be much higher now, given the indirect impact of tariffs on countries where American and Indian product supply chains are deeply interconnected. It will also cause prices of inputs and intermediate goods to rise, which will add to the cost of production. The most affected sectors in the Indo-American context are likely to be electronics, gems and jewelry and pharmaceuticals. All of this forms a crucial backbone of India's

rapidly growing export economy: in the case of smartphones, for instance, India contributes around 10% of US imports. The new measures also include a universal baseline 25% tariff on all automobiles; India will be subjected to this too, regardless of any potential exemptions granted to it. Indian pharmaceuticals, which account for \$7 billion in exports to the US and contribute to about 47% of America's generic drugs, will see raised costs. Similarly, India's \$9 billion textile sector, which is again a labour-intensive industry, will struggle against cheaper competitors like Vietnam and Bangladesh, risking millions of jobs. The \$8.58 billion jewellery export industry will lose its price advantage to rivals such as China and Belgium. Auto parts exports, valued at \$2 billion, will face setbacks, which will disrupt supply chains for US manufacturers. Even IT services, which send almost \$100 billion in exports to the US, are at risk of retaliatory measures that could destabilise India's largest foreign exchange earner.

Tariffs Are Not New

While specific details about the implementation of these tariffs remain unclear, the broader picture reveals Trump's unwavering commitment to protectionist policies. But is that approach new?

Much before Trump's current theatrics on tariffs, former President Joe Biden's own trade policy had increased the size and scope of the first Trump administration's tariffs on Chinese imports. In fact, the Biden administration's combination of tariffs and industrial policies to boost demand for American domestic goods and incentivise investment delivered the manufacturing boom that Trump keeps

promising. It's important to note how by 2023, the United States had the highest rate of investment in factories in 30 years.

As Lori Wallach recently argued, "Labeling tariffs as merely Trumpian is a mistake that Trump's critics have repeatedly made in and outside the US". If you support a carbon border tax to

combat climate change, or enforcement of labour standards in trade pacts, you support tariffs. And tariffs are, mostly, popular—even if not practical. "Shortly before the US presidential election, 56% of Americans favored increasing tariffs, with support among non-college-educated voters in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio at 58%", wrote Wallach.

Flashbacks From Trump's First Term

What Trump did in his first term was reframe tariffs not as economic tools but as instruments of national revival, something that allowed him to renegotiate trade deals to work in American interests. In some ways, he is simply continuing now what he started then, but to a much intense degree.

Trump views trade deficits not as economic imbalances but as evidence of foreign exploitation. The measures launched by him in 2018 included 25% tariffs on steel and 10% on aluminum imports from multiple countries, including allies like Canada and the European Union. The centerpiece of this trade war, however, was China. By imposing tariffs on over Chinese goods worth \$370 billion, the administration ignited a tit-for-tat trade war that came to reshape US-China relations.

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Delimitation Row: It's Not Just A North vs South Story

By KV Prasad

Trump & The Ayatollah:
It's a Pity Both Can't Lose Who can predict the outcome of a tryst between a self-styled "transactional" deal-maker and those who coined the word "Bazaar" and raised negotiations to the art of 'Mutazayedat', or overbidding? Delimitation, the exercise to increase the number of seats in Parliament and state assemblies according to population, has been in a state of deep freeze for the last 50 years. By two constitutional amendments, Parliament had extended the exercise for the first time in 1975 and then in the year 2000. Now, it is in limbo yet for want of a Census, which was stalled in 2020 on account of COVID-19.

On March 22, Chief Ministers of four States—MK Stalin from Tamil Nadu, Revanth Reddy from Telangana, Pinarayi Vijayan from Kerala and Bhagwant Mann from Punjab—and one Deputy Chief Minister, along with a representative of regional parties, met in Chennai and suggested that the next delimitation exercise, due in 2026, should be frozen yet again or have one which is fair.



Stalin, Reddy, Vijayan and Mann were joined by Karnataka's Deputy Chief Minister, DK Shivakumar, Bharat Rashtia Samithi (BRS) leader KT Rama Rao and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) Officiating president Balwinder Singh Bhunder, while Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president Naveen Patnaik attended the meet virtually. Interestingly, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu was conspicuous by his absence at the meeting. This was in sharp contrast to the hyperactive Naidu the country saw in the run-up to the year 2000, when

fancied himself as the CEO of Andhra Pradesh and advocated heavily for small family norms, even exerting pressure on the Vajpayee Government-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) he was supporting at the time, to freeze delimitation. Whether it was political compulsion or pragmatic calculation, nobody knows, but the fact that the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief preferred not to attend the March 22 meeting held by Stalin raised enough eyebrows.

No Straightforward Answers

One thing that's clear after last week's Chennai meeting is that

the move cannot be seen from a simple South vs. North prism. A straightforward calculation based on sheer population numbers will be disadvantageous for those states that have been successful in stabilising their populations and have enforced effective family planning measures. This, in turn, will dilute their political strength in Parliament. Not just southern states, but leaders in Punjab, too, are concerned about losing representation in Parliament and possibly drawing at par with neighbouring Haryana. The effort to bring delimitation back

into focus has been dubbed a political move, with the BJP alleging that it is an attempt to deflect attention from issues around misgovernance. Repeated assurances, including those by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, have failed to allay concerns and did not receive much traction at the Chennai meeting.

The leaders now plan to meet in Hyderabad next.

Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala, Assam and West Bengal are set to have assembly elections next year. In the run-up to that, it may be argued that Stalin is trying to strengthen his profile in national politics. This will not only provide the septuagenarian leader a firmer grip on opposition politics but also help his son Udhyanidhi as he prepares to take the reins of the DMK from his father.

Exploring Options

The delimitation exercise can either be carried out on the basis of the 2011 Census, or it can await a new Census, about which very little is clear at the moment. In the interregnum, leaders suggest that the exercise should be frozen for another quarter of a century, giving other states a chance to stabilise their populations. However, many argue that delimitation could be done in states for assemblies without affecting the balance in New Delhi. In case a decision is finally made not to kick the can further down the road, several options were explored at the Chennai meeting to devise a more elaborate formula for delimitation. These included approaches such as taking into account states' fiscal contribution and development levels to calculate seat shares, or, using a percentage basis to increase the Southern states' share in the Lok Sabha, or, raising the strength of the Rajya Sabha to counter the North's dominance in the Lower House.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led NDA government at the Centre must work with all stakeholders to find a solution that's acceptable to all. Unilateral actions, whether by the Centre or the protesting states, will only imperil India's federal spirit and spawn mutual distrust.

Why a usual US bombing campaign will not bring Iran to heel

By Kabir Taneja

US President Donald Trump has hinted that his first foreign trip since taking office in January would include visits to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. This announcement came hours after he reiterated his rhetoric of unleashing unprecedented bombing against the Shia seat of power, Iran, if it did not meet Washington's demands on nuclear negotiations. During his first term as president, Trump had a testy relationship with Iran. In 2018, he unilaterally exited the Iran nuclear agreement of 2015, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Now, he's looking for a newly negotiated arrangement with Tehran.

In the meantime, the US military buildup in the Middle East is once again palpable. Two carrier strike groups, along with additional squadrons of fighter aircraft, have been deployed to the region. Additionally, the recent stationing of B-2 stealth bombers in the Indian Ocean at the US base in Diego Garcia has



bolstered both posturing and kinetic strength, as air campaigns to diminish the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen continue.

Over the months, the Houthis have built a hold over commercial shipping through the Red Sea. The US-led military operations are seen as critical pushback not just by Trump but also by regional allies such as Israel, Saudi, the UAE and Egypt to make sure one of the arteries of global trade - the Suez Canal - is not lost to a militant actor. However, Trump's threats against Iran to directly target its nuclear facilities currently hang in a grey area. Unlike his first term, the Trump of today is more emboldened, surrounded by a cohort of yes-men, with a propensity to ignore advice

from military planners and move forward only based on his own inclinations. The lack of expertise in his inner circle was recently exposed when chats between his core advisers on Signal were leaked, where Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth allegedly said no one was even sure "who the Houthis are".

Air Power Limitations

Any military action against Iran from the US will have to be exclusively done using air power. But this is easier said than done. There is a history of nuclear programmes in the Middle East being taken out by airstrikes carried out by Israel. In 1981, Israel struck Iraq's nuclear programme near Baghdad as part of Operation Opera. Similarly, in 2007, Israel struck a suspected nuclear site in the Syrian Desert as part of Operation Orchard. Interestingly, it's not just Israel - the only nuclear power in the region - that has targeted nuclear facilities. In 1980, during the Iran-Iraq war, Tehran launched Operation Scorch Sword aimed at Iraq's Osirak nuclear facility in a bid to derail the country's nuclear ambitions.

TV news went looking for violence during Eid. They found pyaar, mohabbat

By SHAILAJA BAJPAI

Eid and the Waqf Amendment Bill 2024. These two events have ensured that Muslims, who represent about 18.5 per cent of India's population, have received more than 85 per cent of the coverage on television news channels in the last three days. On Wednesday, it reached a saturation point with live coverage of the debate on the Waqf Bill in the Lok Sabha throughout the day, followed by studio debates on the Lok Sabha debate all evening and into the night.

On Monday, coverage of Eid and the Waqf Bill began early in the morning and carried on into prime time. On Tuesday, the channels "simmered" and "boiled", to use their own words, in the build-up to Wednesday's debate.

The coverage itself was confusing. TV news gave you the impression that there were widespread and violent protests on Eid across northern India.



Especially on Hindi channels, the focus was on protests and violence during the celebrations. Meanwhile, leading English newspapers and websites barely touched upon either on Monday or Tuesday. You would have had to read with a magnifying glass to find any mention of these in the Delhi editions of The Times of India, Hindustan Times, The Indian Express. The Hindu story, "Eid prayers held under enhanced security in UP", referred to a few trouble spots in Uttar Pradesh, but that was that. This was far too bland for news channels, so they went looking for trouble wherever they could find it and suddenly a blip on the radar became a "bawaal"

(ruckus). Channels such as Aaj Tak, India TV, Times Now Navbharat, Republic Bharat, TV 9 Bharatvarsh, Zee News returned repeatedly to Moradabad, where Muslims or "namazis" as news anchors chose to call them, were on the streets—"Moradabad mein hungama," said TNNB. For good measure, the channel added, "Shahar-shahar mein hungama" (furore across cities).

ABP News told us that there were arguments with the police regarding delays in reaching the Idgah on time for namaz. NDTV India added that a second namaz had been arranged after a "halki si" (small) argument. No 'hungama'.

Throughout Monday, we watched coverage of Eid 'hungama' or 'bawaal'—from Mumbai in Maharashtra and Tonk in Rajasthan to Meerut and Saharanpur in UP. In Tonk and Bihar's Darbhanga, "Muslim mob open instigation caught on camera, call to protest against Hindu festival. This is brazen provocation caught on camera..." said Republic TV.

The reporter at Zee News tried his best to find "provocation" in Malad, but he was surrounded by Muslims who told him "nothing has happened"—"pyaar, mohabbat se jao..." (keep the peace and leave) and shooed him away.

India TV's anchor was impressed by the Muslims "jumping" up and down and protesting against the Waqf Bill in Tonk. So too in Bhopal—all channels went to the Madhesh Pradesh capital to display the black bands and protest signboards against the Waqf bill and in support of Palestine. TV screens were split into 6 or 8

boxes for show us protests and violence....

And so it went on and on all Monday. But wait on, authorities like the UP Director-General of Police Prashant Kumar said Eid had passed off peacefully. An impending 'war' Protests against the Waqf Bill on Eid made good television imagery.

So did Yogi Adityanath, who in an interview with PTI, spoke about both. He questioned the current Waqf Board's steps to benefit Muslims and advised Muslims to learn from Hindus in public expressions of their faith. For this, he referred to the Mahakumbh, not once mentioning the stampedes, deaths or the inconvenience on the streets to millions of commuters in Prayagraj throughout the Mahakumbh.

TV news also criticised Muslims for wanting to hold namaz on streets when it had been prohibited- "Cops v/s Namazis" said India Today.

Coup rumours are circulating in Dhaka. Here's why the army isn't keen on it



By Praveen Swami

The Fakir was sitting cross-legged on a charpai, dressed in a lungi and banyan, and surrounded by drying laundry. Farida Sayed, as she sat herself on the wooden stool in front of him, imagined he was surrounded by the scent of flowers and a cool breeze. For the past hour, Farida had been stuck in an autorickshaw, struggling through traffic to Chittagong's Hali Shar to deliver a message from her husband, Major Sayed Farooq-ur-Rahman, to the powerful mystic

Andha Hafiz. In just hours, the Major would stage Bangladesh's first coup d'état—but first, he needed to be sure the mystic saw doom in his enemy's stars. "Forget it," Bangladesh's founding patriarch and president, Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman, told the young officers who arrived in his office to kill him, "The Pakistan army couldn't do it." That evening, fifty years ago this August, Sheikh Mujib would be killed with much of his family, the journalist and author Anthony Mascarenhas recorded. The assassins even shot dead his

daughters-in-law as well as his youngest son, twelve-year-old Russel. For weeks now, many in Bangladesh have been wondering if the country's dysfunctional democracy is again driving it toward military rule. Large-scale mob violence, often pitting young people against police, continues to claim lives six months after it forced Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from office. Economic distress persists, and religious minorities continue to face attack. Even as coup rumours circulate around Dhaka, though, there's reason to suspect that taking power isn't a choice army chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman would willingly make. Ever since 1991, when democracy was restored in the country, the country's parties have institutionalised factionalism within the military, creating systems that chain the Generals not to the state but to patronage networks run by the political leadership.



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Indian taxpayers are paying for a clownish police investigation into Kunal Kamra

By Vir Sanghvi

Idon't like returning to the same subject again and again but the current state of free speech in India leaves me with very little choice. The last time I wrote about the subject was when there was an uproar over remarks made by Ranveer Allahbadia and Samay Raina. As the BeerBiceps guy, Allahbadia has spent the last two or three years kissing the toes of the government. There was a certain amount of smugness and schadenfreude among those who disapproved of his relentless chamchagiri (sycophancy) of his powerful benefactors.

I said then that it was dangerous to defend free speech only for those we approved of. The point of free speech was that we defended it even when we disagreed with what was said and who said it. As for 'offending sentiments', one explanation that is frequently offered for locking people up, that is a total non-starter. The Constitution was not written to prevent uncles and aunties from being shocked or offended.

I hope those who gloated when Allahbadia was persecuted have recognised how wrong they were now that the authorities have gone after comedian Kunal Kamra, a liberal hero. You always defend the principle, not the individual, because otherwise those who you approve of – and you yourself – will be the next targets. 'Even freedom has limits'

What is happening to Kunal Kamra is completely indefensible. It is instructive



that even the government's loyalists on social media have not defended the persecution. Instead, they have been instructed to fall back on 'whataboutery'. Their arguments are restricted to 'but did you say anything when (insert name of Right-wing figure here) was arrested or banned?'

It's the logical equivalent of saying that we can't arrest murderers because some have gone unpunished, or that it's okay to justify genocide because not all genocides have been equally condemned. Nor is it fine to say that there is nothing unusual about mobs of political goondas trashing performance venues or offices because it happens all the time.

Yes, it does happen frequently and it is always disgraceful when it does. But there is a difference this time. The goondas are acting in the name of Maharashtra's sitting

deputy chief minister and former CM, Eknath Shinde. Even current chief minister Devendra Fadnavis joined in the attack and blamed Kamra. The basic arguments offered by the state government were:

- 1) Even freedom has some limits
- 2) Kamra made a classist attack on the deputy chief minister, who rose from being a rickshaw driver to a position of influence and wealth by virtue of tapasya (penance) and eschewing all worldly goods. (Okay I made up the last bit)
- 3) Err, that's all we can think of at the moment but give us some time and we will invent new reasons.

If this sounds foolish and silly, it's because it is. True cost of comedy

In fact, the real reason is completely different. Attack a politician and he or she will find a suitable counter argument or at least a vague defence. But make fun of

him or her and they will lose all sense of proportion and perhaps their mental balance.

Most politicians have no wit, and no sense of humour. They can handle criticism but ridicule drives them mad. They have plotted and schemed and manipulated their road to power with so much effort that they cannot bear to think that even after they have got to the top, they are still figures of fun and the punchlines of jokes. This was true of Soviet rulers, who locked up comedians. Take this old Soviet joke: "Did you hear about the man who ran around Moscow shouting 'Brezhnev is an idiot'? He was sentenced to 25 years in a gulag. Five years for ridiculing our great leader. And 20 years for revealing a state secret." And it was true of Adolf Hitler, who was prepared to face criticism from the Allies but was driven to apoplexy by Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, a 1940 comedy film in which Chaplin (whose moustache made him something of a Hitler lookalike) sent up the Nazis and the führer himself. That's what is happening in Mumbai today. Kamra's 'crime' is that he dared turn a powerful politician into the subject of a joke. And because of one man's fragile ego, many innocent people have paid a terrible price as the full might of the state has been unleashed upon them. The municipal authorities suddenly found reasons to turn up at the venue because of alleged irregularities. The venue has had to close down and people have lost jobs.

Trump is playing the 'commitment game'. India must be smart, not surrender

By AMITABH DUBEY

As predicted, Liberation Day is here. Trump is bringing chaos to the world economy—and to India—with his punitive trade tariffs on the US' major trading partners. As the global stock selloff indicates, the tariffs will cause an immediate dip in global trade unless countries offer concessions to forestall the 9 April deadline for reciprocal tariffs. The fact that the Indian market only dipped moderately suggests that a compromise is expected. Trump is playing what economist Thomas Schelling called a 'commitment game'—a player locks themselves into a risky strategy that would be politically costly to reverse unilaterally in an effort to push opponents to compromise.

Clearly, Trump thinks that his signal of resolve, and his willingness to accept the economic costs of a trade war, will push other countries to compromise. The fact that these steps are irrational economically is beside the point. So, what should India do?



Protections without protectionism

First, avoid knee-jerk reactions that hurt Indian companies, such as duty cuts on bourbon whisky and Harley-Davidson motorcycles, or orders for Javelin missiles and Stryker armoured vehicles announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in February during his US visit. These damaged the interests of Indian companies making similar products (goodbye Atmanirbhar Bharat) and didn't stop Trump from criticising India's tariffs in the PM's presence; also previously

labelled India as a "tariff abuser".

India should instead use this crisis to reverse the disturbing trend of greater protectionism in recent years, which has hurt consumers and only helped the large monopolies that have close links to Modi.

Second, protect vulnerable sections such as Indian farmers, who have to cope with extreme commodity price volatility even with high tariffs. Third, ensure that growing sectors like automobiles—developed over

decades—are not casually sacrificed to appease Trump or Elon Musk, or even Chinese companies smart enough to tie up with Indian firms close to Modi. Inaction is not an option given how vulnerable India is to US action. The US is the only major trading partner with whom India has a trade surplus, which hit a record \$46 billion in 2024, more than double what it was in 2018. Nineteen per cent of Indian exports (April–December 2024) go to the US, while only about 2 per cent of US exports go to India.

An opportunity to dismantle cronyism. Theoretically, a trade war between the United States and China could help India. Companies have pursued "China Plus One" policies for some years now, reducing their supply chain dependence on China by investing in alternative emerging markets. But as the NITI Aayog has admitted, companies have chosen to invest in more investment-friendly countries like Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia.

PM pushes for 'development-ism, not expansionism' as India, **Thailand cement ties**

India and Thailand upgraded their ties to a strategic partnership, emphasising trade, security, and cultural cooperation. Prime Minister Modi highlighted their shared commitment to a free Indo-Pacific and ASEAN unity during his visit for the BIMSTEC summit.

(News Agency)- India and Thailand on Thursday decided to elevate their relations to the level of a strategic partnership, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserting that both countries support a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and believe in a policy of development, not expansionism. Modi made the remarks at a joint press event with his Thai counterpart, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, after holding delegation-level talks during which they held extensive discussions on various areas of bilateral cooperation.

"We have emphasised cooperation in the fields of tourism, culture, and education between India's northeastern states and Thailand. We

discussed enhancing mutual trade, investment, and exchanges between businesses," Modi said about his talks with Shinawatra. Agreements have also been made for cooperation in MSME, handloom, and handicraft, he noted. Modi asserted that Thailand holds a special place in India's 'Act East' Policy and the Indo-Pacific vision. "Today, we have decided to elevate our relations to the level of a Strategic Partnership. Discussions were also held on establishing a 'Strategic Dialogue' between security agencies," Modi said.

He said India fully supports ASEAN unity and ASEAN centrality.

"In the Indo-Pacific, we both support a free, open, inclusive,

and rules-based order. We believe in the policy of vikaasvaad, not vistaarvaad (development-ism, not expansionism)," Modi said.

"I am grateful to the Thai government for issuing a special postage stamp based on the 18th-century Ramayana mural paintings on the occasion of my visit," he said.

Modi said Prime Minister Shinawatra presented him with the Tripitaka.

"On behalf of the Buddha-land India, I accepted it with folded hands," he added.

The centuries-old relationship between India and Thailand is tied to their deep cultural and spiritual threads, he said. The spread of Buddhism has

connected our people at every



level, Modi added. "There has been an exchange of scholars from Ayutthaya to Nalanda. The tale of the Ramayana is deeply woven into Thai folk life," he said.

"And the influence of Sanskrit-Pali is still reflected in the languages and traditions today," he added. Modi also conveyed condolences on behalf of Indians on the loss of lives caused by the earthquake on March 28.

"We pray for the speedy recovery of those who were injured," he said.

Modi, who arrived here on a two-day visit to attend the 6th BIMSTEC summit, earlier received a Guard of Honour and also witnessed a mesmerising Ramakien—Thai Ramayana—performance.

The Prime Minister will later join the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) leaders from Thailand, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, and Bhutan to oversee the signing of the Agreement on Maritime Cooperation.

Pak violated ceasefire in Jammu-Kashmir's Poonch last night, twice in 3 days



Pakistan violated the ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) in the Krishna Ghati sector of Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Monday evening, marking the second such incident in three days. The unprovoked firing by Pakistani troops was met with strong retaliation from the Indian Army, sources said.

This is the second ceasefire violation by Pakistan in three days. On Tuesday, Pakistan resorted to another ceasefire violation following mine blasts at the LoC in Poonch. The Pakistani Army reportedly attempted to push infiltrators across the border while providing them with cover fire. The Indian Army responded swiftly, eliminating the threat.

Sources indicate that the firing was an attempt to push infiltrators into Indian territory under cover fire. Intelligence

inputs suggest that Pakistan was trying to send a terrorist Border Action Team (BAT) across the LoC to create unrest in Jammu and Kashmir. However, the alertness of Indian troops thwarted the infiltration bid. According to sources, four to five Pakistani Army personnel were killed in India's retaliatory action. Following the April 1 ceasefire violation, images surfaced of injured Pakistani soldiers, confirming the impact of India's response. Additionally, pictures of the last rites of Pakistani Army personnel have also emerged, further indicating casualties suffered on their side. A Pakistani news portal broadcast footage of soldiers paying tribute to personnel killed in India's retaliatory strike, further corroborating reports that multiple Pakistani Army personnel were eliminated in the April 1 attack.

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Trump's 'Liberation Day' tariff: India at 27%, but where does Pakistan stand?

Asian nations have been the hardest hit by Trump's latest tariff move. The new duties aim to cut the US trade deficit and change global supply chains.



(News Agency)- US President Donald Trump announced a fresh wave of tariffs on Wednesday, calling it the 'Liberation Day' for the US trade. While India faces a 27% tariff, Pakistan's position in this new tariff war is also drawing attention. The country is now being subjected to a 29% tariff on exports coming into the US. Trump justified the imposition of reciprocal tariffs by arguing that this was needed in order to fix trade imbalances and provide equitable treatment for American products. For years, Trump has pushed

for changes in global trade policies, arguing that other nations impose high tariffs on US goods while benefiting from lower tariffs in return. He explained that Pakistan has been charging a 58% tariff on American goods, prompting the US to respond with its own 29% duty.

The US is one of Pakistan's biggest trading partners. In 2023, Pakistan exported goods worth \$5.18 billion to the US, while American exports to Pakistan stood at \$1.71 billion, according to a report from The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC).

ASIAN NATIONS HIT WITH STEEPEST TARIFFS

Asian nations have been the hardest hit by Trump's latest tariff move. The new duties aim to cut the US trade deficit and

change global supply chains. Besides China, which now faces a total tariff of 54%, Vietnam has been slapped with 46%, Thailand with 37%, South Korea with 25%, and India with 27%.

Over the years, many companies shifted production from China to countries like Vietnam, Thailand, and India to avoid previous US tariffs and reduce reliance on China. However, it now seems that the US is targeting these alternative manufacturing hubs too.

Meanwhile, Trump's new policy sets a baseline tariff of 10% on all imports, with even higher rates for countries he believes have unfair trade practices. The White House has announced that the 10% tariff will take effect on April 5, while the higher duties for specific nations will begin on April 9.

S Jaishankar's 'cherry-picking' jab at Bangladesh's Northeast 'landlocked' claim

S Jaishankar rebuked Bangladesh's Muhammad Yunus for calling India's Northeast 'landlocked', asserting New Delhi's regional connectivity role.

(News Agency)- External Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar on Thursday slammed Bangladesh's chief adviser, Muhammad Yunus, for labelling India's Northeastern states 'landlocked' and said New Delhi believes that cooperation is an integrated outlook, not one subject to cherry-picking.

In an official statement, Jaishankar also said that India is aware of its responsibility with regard to the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). "We, after all, have the longest coastline in the Bay of Bengal, of almost 6,500 km. India shares borders not only with the five BIMSTEC members, and connects most of them, but also provides much of the interface

between the Indian sub-continent and ASEAN. Our North-Eastern region in particular is emerging as a connectivity hub for the BIMSTEC, with a myriad network of roads, railways, waterways, grids and pipelines," the External Affairs Minister said. Jaishankar's remarks came days after Muhammad Yunus, during his recent four-day visit to China, described India's Northeast as 'landlocked' with "no way to reach out to the ocean," positioning Bangladesh as the region's primary maritime gateway.

The Chief Adviser also requested Beijing to expand its economic influence in Bangladesh, calling the country the "only guardian of the ocean" in the region. "We are conscious that our cooperation and facilitation are an essential prerequisite for the smooth flow of goods, services and people in this larger geography. Keeping this geo-strategic factor in mind, we have devoted increasing energies and attention to the strengthening of BIMSTEC in the last decade. We also believe that cooperation is an integrated outlook, not one subject to cherry-picking," Jaishankar said.

Yunus's remarks ignited a firestorm, particularly in the Northeast, drawing sharp condemnation. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma denounced the statements as "offensive and unacceptable". Sarma also cautioned that Yunus's remarks reignited debates over the strategic



"Chicken's Neck" corridor, the narrow land strip in West Bengal linking the Northeast to the rest of India. "Historically, internal elements within India have dangerously suggested severing this critical passageway. Therefore, it is imperative to develop more robust railway and road networks both underneath

and around the Chicken's Neck corridor," the Chief Minister said. Former Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh accused Bangladesh's interim government of viewing India's Northeast as a "strategic pawn" and cautioned Yunus against making 'irresponsible' remarks on India's sovereignty.

Hungary says it will pull out of ICC as Orban hosts Israel's Netanyahu – who is wanted by the court

Hungary will withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC), its government said Wednesday, as the country's Prime Minister Viktor Orban welcomed Israeli Prime Minister and ICC fugitive Benjamin Netanyahu to Budapest.

Speaking alongside Netanyahu in Budapest, Orban said his government decided to leave the court because it has become "a political tool." "This very important court has been diminished to a political tool and Hungary wishes to play no role in it," Orban told reporters during the joint news conference.

Netanyahu praised the decision as "bold and principled," praising Hungary for its "proud" support for Israel.

"This is important not just for us, but for all democracies ... it's important to stand up to this corrupt organization," he said. The Israeli PM said he expects Hungary to be the first, but not



last country to walk away from the court.

The leaders delivered their short statements without taking any questions.

Netanyahu's visit to Hungary marked the first time the Israeli leader stepped foot on European soil since the ICC issued an arrest warrant against him and his former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, as well as against three top officials of Hamas, in May 2024.

The court said it had

"reasonable grounds" to believe Netanyahu bears criminal responsibility for war crimes including "starvation as a method of warfare" and "the crimes against humanity of murder, persecution, and other inhumane acts."

Netanyahu dismissed the warrant as "absurd and antisemitic."

"Israel utterly rejects the absurd and false actions and accusations against it by the International Criminal Court, which is a politically biased

and discriminatory body," his office said at the time.

The ICC doesn't have its own law enforcement powers, so it relies on its member states to make arrests and transfer suspects to the Hague. As a signatory of the Rome Statute, which established the court in 2002, Hungary is obliged to arrest Netanyahu.

But instead, Netanyahu got a warm welcome in the Hungarian capital where he is on a four-day visit. A welcoming ceremony at the

Lion's Court of the imposing Buda Castle saw him walk down a red carpet with Orban on Thursday, before the two leaders held talks.

Hungary is one of Israel's strongest European allies and many Hungarians hold a strong pro-Israel sentiment. Stickers and posters commemorating the victims of the October 7 terror attack against Israel are a common sign across Budapest. A Holocaust memorial on the bank of the River Danube just outside the Hungarian Parliament has been adorned with yellow ribbons, signaling the support for the hostages held in Gaza. Hungary's State Secretary for International Communication and Relations Zoltan Kovacs said the country will begin the withdrawal process on Thursday, "in line with Hungary's constitutional and international legal obligations."

The ICC said it would issue a statement on the announcement later.

Africa's first 'AI factory' could be a breakthrough for the continent

There's excitement bubbling in Kigali, Rwanda, ahead of the Global AI Summit on Africa, which opens today, promising economic opportunities and innovation.

Not least because of last week's announcement from Cassava Technologies, a tech firm founded by Zimbabwean telecoms billionaire Strive Masiyiwa, that it would be building Africa's first "artificial intelligence factory," in partnership with leading AI chipmaker Nvidia.

Nvidia's supercomputers, which use graphic processing units, or GPUs, (the chips that often power AI), will be deployed at Cassava's data centers in South Africa from as early as June, before being rolled out across the company's other facilities in Egypt, Kenya, Morocco and Nigeria.

Africa has fallen behind the global AI boom due in part to a lack of computing power. Analysis from Zindi, a community of 80,000 AI builders across 52 African countries, found that only 5% of Africa's AI practitioners have access to computational power for research and innovation. Better access to GPUs will help to "drive the AI revolution" across the continent, says Alex Tsado, founder and director of Alliance4AI, a non-profit that helps African institutions adopt emerging

technologies. Currently, there are no big GPU clusters in Africa and this is holding innovators back: "If you don't have access to GPUs, it takes you many more hours, if not days, to build the same solutions (or AI systems) than it would take someone else who is in a place where they do have access (like the US or Europe)," he tells CNN. "People start to see more reasons to gather data, because now they can process it; people start to see more reasons to train talent, because now there's GPUs ... (It) triggers the ecosystem to accelerate all the progress that they've already been making." While Cassava is yet to divulge details of its deployment plan, it said in a press release that Nvidia's GPU-based supercomputers will enable faster AI model training and that the data centers will ensure businesses and researchers have access to the AI computing power required to build, train, scale and deploy AI in a secure environment.

"Our AI factory provides the infrastructure for this innovation to scale, empowering African businesses, startups and researchers with access to cutting-edge AI infrastructure to turn their bold ideas into real-world breakthroughs — and now, they don't have to look beyond Africa to get it," said Masiyiwa in the press release.



UK lists thousands of US goods which could face any retaliatory tariffs



and other economies in immediately threatening to retaliate with its own measures. The list of 8,000 product categories published by the government on which any future retaliatory tariffs could be imposed covered around 27% of British imports of U.S.-origin products. The list is now subject to a four-week consultation with businesses. Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds said his priority was to reach a deal with the U.S. but that the consultation was a formal step necessary so the government could keep all options on the table.

"(The) talks with the US will continue to reflect our mandate to deliver economic stability, as we press the case for a trading relationship that supports businesses on both sides of the Atlantic," Reynolds said in a statement.

He said the consultation, which will run until May 1, would be paused and any measures would be reversed were the two countries to agree a deal.

(News Agency)- Britain on Wednesday published a 400-page list of U.S. goods it could include in any possible retaliatory tariff response to President Donald Trump's levies on British imports, even as it pressed ahead with talks to reach an economic deal with Washington.

The "indicative long list" of products included everything from binoculars and bourbon whiskey to automotive parts

and cheese. The list also includes petrol, diesel and electric passenger vehicles and food products including meat and fish.

The government stressed that not all goods on the list would be subject to any future tariffs. Britain says it has adopted a "cool-headed" approach to Trump's 10% tariffs, the lowest among the sweeping levies on dozens of other nations, rather than follow the European Union

How to help those affected by the Myanmar earthquake



(News Agency)- A 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck Myanmar on March 28 causing mass destruction. More than 3,000 are dead and thousands more injured.

The earthquake is the most powerful to strike Myanmar in over a century, according to the

United States Geological Survey (USGS).

Tremors were also felt in China and Thailand, which caused a building to collapse in Bangkok.

Aid groups are on the ground to help those affected. You can assist them by clicking [HERE](#) or using the form below.

Actor Jean-Claude Van Damme Accepted Sex With 5 Women As "Gift": Report

The 64-year-old Street Fighter actor is accused of accepting five Romanian women as a "gift" from a criminal network led by Morel Bolea, according to CNN affiliate Antena 3.

(News Agency)-Actor Jean-Claude Van Damme is facing a criminal complaint in Romania for allegedly engaging in sexual relations with trafficked women. The 64-year-old Street Fighter actor is accused of accepting five Romanian women as a "gift" from a criminal network led by Morel Bolea, according to CNN affiliate Antena 3.

Romanian authorities have filed a complaint with the Directorate for Investigating Organised Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT), alleging the 64-year-old was aware the women were victims of human trafficking. The alleged incident reportedly took place in Cannes, France,

during an event organised by Van Damme. One of the women later provided testimony, leading DIICOT to launch an investigation.

Attorney Adrian Cuculis, representing one of the victims, said, "The women were in a state of vulnerability, with clear indications of exploitation."

He further said, "Several Romanians under investigation for forming a criminal group and trafficking offered Jean-Claude Van Damme five Romanian women. The recipient knew their condition."

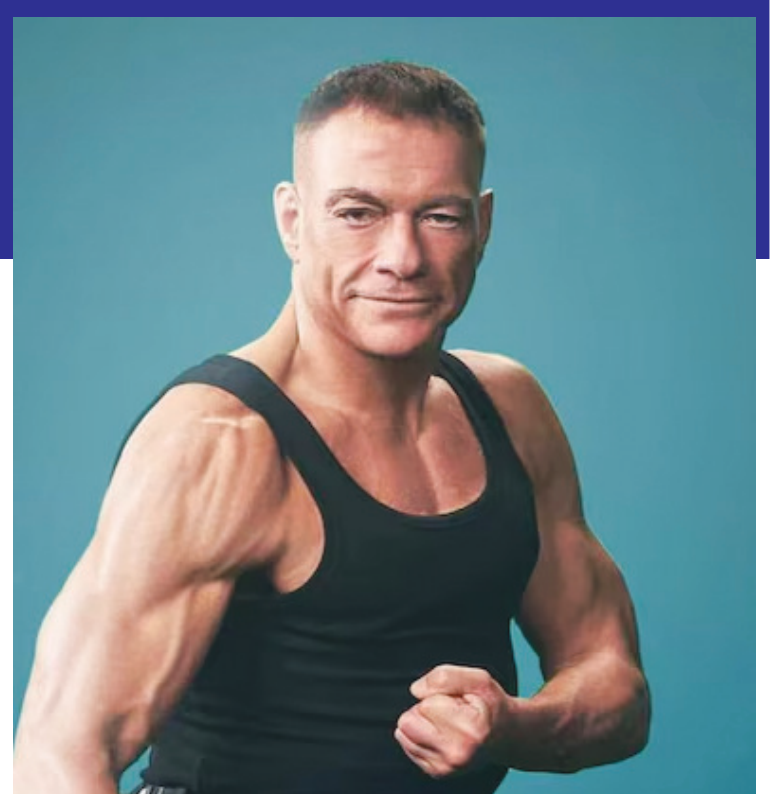
It's the second high-profile case from Romania after Andrew and Tristan Tate were arrested on

sex trafficking charges in 2022 and only recently permitted to leave the country.

Who is Jean-Claude Van Damme?

Jean-Claude Van Damme is a Belgian martial artist, actor, and filmmaker, best known for action films like Bloodsport (1988), Kickboxer (1989), and Universal Soldier (1992). Born in 1960 in Belgium, he trained in karate and kickboxing before moving to Hollywood in the 1980s.

Nicknamed "The Muscles from Brussels," he became a major action star in the '90s. Despite career highs, he faced struggles with substance abuse and legal issues. He was addicted to



cocaine and was arrested for drunk driving and domestic violence once.

As a teenager, he held records in competitive karate - achieving

44 victories and only four defeats. He was a member of the Belgium Karate Team that won the European Karate Championship in 1979.

Will Trump's Latest Tariffs Launch a Global Trade War?

As expected, US President Donald Trump announced new tariffs on April 2. This batch of tariffs will hit both the country's closest allies, like Japan, and adversaries, like China. At an elaborate ceremony in the White House Rose Garden, Trump said the day would "forever be remembered as the day American industry was reborn."

He added that the duties would bring in trillions of dollars "to reduce taxes and pay down our national debt."

What has Trump proposed?

The tariffs add a 10% tariff on nearly all imported goods from all trading partners. Additionally, reciprocal tariffs would be imposed on imports from dozens of countries. For imports from the European Union, a new 20% tariff will be set. For individual countries on the list, the rate varies: China 34%, Japan 24%, Vietnam 46%, South Korea 26%, Taiwan 32%.

Goods from Switzerland will be hit with an additional 32% tariff, Israel with 17% and India with 27%.

Russia and Ukraine are not on the reciprocal tariff list.

Certain medical devices, semiconductors, pharmaceuticals and gold are also, so far, exempt from reciprocal customs duties.

The baseline import tariff of 10% will go

into force on April 5, leaving little time for negotiating. The higher rates on various countries are set to take effect on April 9.

Both these sets of tariffs come on top of existing US tariffs on China and levies on steel, aluminum, and cars.

How are Americans reacting to the news?

There was a swift reaction from industry groups and economists.

"Many manufacturers in the United States already operate with thin margins," said Jay Timmons, the president of the National Association of Manufacturers. "The high costs of new tariffs threaten investment, jobs, supply chains and, in turn, America's ability to outcompete other nations and lead as the preeminent manufacturing superpower."

Gary Shapiro, head of the Consumer Technology Association, is similarly dismayed. "President Trump's sweeping global and reciprocal tariffs are massive tax hikes on Americans that will drive inflation, kill jobs on Main Street, and may cause a recession for the US economy," said Shapiro in a statement. "These tariffs will raise consumer prices and will force our trade partners to retaliate."

Former US Treasury Secretary Lawrence

Summers said the Trump administration's tariff hikes will shock the economy and boost both prices and unemployment.

"This is the kind of thing you discuss in the way we would usually discuss an oil-price spike or earthquake or a drought, as a supply shock," Summers said on Bloomberg Television's Wall Street Week. "The question is mostly how much damage is going to be done." With friends like these, who needs tariffs? These latest tariffs come as the president is ripping up decades of global trade rules and calling for the annexation of Canada, Greenland and a takeover of the Panama Canal. These new tariffs will lead to uncertainty, supply chain disruptions, more bureaucracy and higher grocery bills, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. Frustratingly, "there seems to be no order in the disorder," she added. "We are already finalizing a first package of countermeasures in response to tariffs on steel. And we are now preparing for further countermeasures to protect our interests and our businesses if negotiations fail," she said.

Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni was a bit more conciliatory on Facebook. "We will do everything we can to work toward an agreement with the United States, with the aim of avoiding a trade war

that would inevitably weaken the West in favor of other global players," she wrote. How are investors reacting to the tariffs?

"Overall, the size of the tariffs added to the sense of a push for a radical policy reordering by the new US administration," wrote Jim Reid, a research strategist at Deutsche Bank, in a note to investors. But they "didn't add much confidence on there being an in-depth strategic implementation plan." The new average tariffs on US imports were "a level clearly on the worst end of expectations" and could knock off around 1-1.5% of US growth this year, according to Reid. For China, the 34% is on top of existing rates, meaning Chinese goods will be hit with tariffs of 54%. The new reciprocal tariffs turned out to be bigger than expected, agreed Neil Shearing, group chief economist at consultancy Capital Economics.

Canada and Mexico got off lightly and will be subject to 25% tariffs but only on things not covered by the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. "Other winners include Australia, Brazil and the UK, who will only incur the minimum 10% tariff," Shearing wrote. "In broad terms, China and other countries in Asia have been hit relatively hard."

Trump tariffs provoke world condemnation and fears of a \$2,300 iPhone

Countries around the world threatened to ratchet up a trade war with the United States as President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs ignited fears of price hikes in the world's largest consumer market and a global economic downturn.

The penalties announced by Trump on Wednesday triggered a plunge in world financial markets and drew condemnation from other leaders reckoning with the end of a decades-long era of trade liberalization. But there were conflicting messages from the White House about whether the tariffs were meant to be permanent or were a tactic to win concessions, with Trump saying they "give us great power to negotiate."

The U.S. tariffs would amount to the highest trade barriers in more than a century: a 10% baseline tariff on all imports and higher targeted duties on some of the country's biggest trading partners.

That could jack up the price for U.S. shoppers of everything from cannabis to running shoes to Apple's iPhone. A high-end iPhone could cost nearly \$2,300 if Apple passes the costs on to consumers, based on projections from Rosenblatt Securities. Businesses raced to adjust. Automaker Stellantis said it would temporarily lay off U.S. workers and close plants in Canada and Mexico, while General Motors (GM.N), opens new tab said it would increase U.S. production.

Investment bank JP Morgan said it now sees a 60% chance of the global economy entering recession by year end, up from 40% previously.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney

said the United States had abandoned its historic role as a champion of international economic cooperation.

"The global economy is fundamentally different today than it was yesterday," he said as he announced a limited set of countermeasures.

Elsewhere, China vowed retaliation for Trump's 54% tariffs on imports from the world's No. 2 economy, as did the European Union, which faces a 20% duty.

French President Emmanuel Macron called for European countries to suspend investment in the United States.

Other trading partners, including Japan, South Korea, Mexico and India, said they would hold off on any retaliation for now as they seek concessions.

Washington's allies and rivals alike warned of a devastating blow to global trade. Japan, one of the United States' biggest trading partners and its largest foreign investor, is now facing a "national crisis", Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba told parliament.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva called on Washington and its trading partners to work to resolve trade tensions and reduce uncertainty.

The tariffs "clearly represent a significant risk to the global outlook at a time of sluggish growth," Georgieva said.

U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and senior trade adviser Peter Navarro both told cable news programs on Thursday the president would not back off, and that the tariff increases were not a negotiation. Trump then appeared to contradict them, telling reporters, "The tar-

iffs give us great power to negotiate. Always have. I used it very well in the first administration, as you saw, but now we're taking it to a whole new level."

Stocks suffered a global meltdown, the U.S. dollar crumbled and oil prices were set for their worst week in months as analysts warned the tariffs could dent demand, upend supply chains and hurt corporate profits.

The Dow (.DJI), opens new tab fell nearly 4%, its biggest one-day percentage loss since June 2020. The S&P 500 (.SPX), opens new tab lost nearly 5% and the tech-heavy Nasdaq (.IXIC), opens new tab declined nearly 6%, its worst day in percentage terms since the pandemic era of March 2020.

American companies with significant overseas production took a hit. Nike (NKE.N), opens new tab shares lost 14% and Apple (AAPL.O), opens new tab fell 9%.

The pain for markets continued into Friday, with Japan's Nikkei (.N225), opens new tab set for its biggest weekly drop in five years in a rout led by banking stocks. Japanese bond yields fell sharply as investors bet the Bank of Japan may be forced to rethink its plans to raise interest rates.

Trump says the "reciprocal" tariffs are a response to barriers put on U.S. goods, while administration officials said the tariffs would create manufacturing jobs at home and open up export markets abroad, although they cautioned it would take time to see results.

Vice President JD Vance in an interview with Newsmax faulted critics for taking a

short-term view. "That's fundamentally what this is about, the national security of manufacturing and making the things that we need, from steel to pharmaceuticals," Vance said. Since returning to the White House in January, Trump's on-again, off-again tariff threats have rattled consumer and business confidence. Trump could step back again, as the reciprocal tariffs are not due to take effect until April 9.

"The tariff plan does not appear to be well thought-out. Trade negotiations are a highly technical discipline, and in our view these proposals do not offer a serious basis for negotiations with any country," said James Lucier, founding partner at Capital Alpha. Economists say the tariffs could reignite inflation, raise the risk of a U.S. recession and boost costs for the average U.S. family by thousands of dollars. Analysts said the tariffs could also alienate allies in Asia and undercut strategic efforts to contain China.

Trump has slapped a 24% tariff on Japan and a 25% tariff on South Korea, both home to major U.S. military bases. He also hit Taiwan with a 32% tariff as the island faces increased military pressure from China. Canada and Mexico, the largest U.S. trading partners, were not hit with targeted tariffs on Wednesday, but they already face 25% tariffs on many goods and now face a separate set of tariffs on auto imports. Reporting by Reuters newsrooms; Writing by Andy Sullivan, Daniel Trotta and John Geddie; Editing by Sharon Singleton, Alistair Bell, Nia Williams and Stephen Coates

He "Founded Hindu Nation", Then Attempted To Take Over Land In Bolivia

(Sai Bureau) -Self-styled godman Nithyananda fled India in 2019, leaving behind a sprawling religious empire, after being accused of child abduction, sexual assault and abuse, and claimed to have founded the nation of 'Kailasa', calling it a "safe haven for practising, aspiring or persecuted Hindus". Representatives of the 'country' attended a UN meeting in 2023, signed a 'sister cities' agreement with Newark in the US and had their photos taken with many leaders across the globe. But their luck may have finally run out.

Officials in the South American country of Bolivia said last week that they have arrested 20 people linked to 'Kailasa' after they signed 1,000-year leases with indigenous groups in the country for vast tracts of the Amazon, the New York Times reported.

The agreements were nullified and the representatives of the fake country were deported to the real nations they belonged to, including India, the US and China.

"Bolivia does not maintain diplomatic relations with the alleged nation 'United States of Kailasa,'" Bolivia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs told the New York Times. Representatives of 'Kailasa' had managed to get a photo taken with the president of Bolivia, Luis Arce and Bolivian newspaper El Deber said leases had been signed with indigenous groups. Pedro Guasico, a leader of the Baure, one of the indigenous groups, said its contact with 'Kailasa' representatives had begun in late 2024, after they offered help with forest fires.

They then negotiated a lease for land "three times the size of New Delhi" and the Baure agreed to a 25-year deal which would net them nearly \$200,000 annually. The 'Kailasa' representatives' draft, though, was for a lease of 1,000 years and included the use of airspace and extraction of natural resources. The Baure signed the lease. "We made the mistake of listening to them. They offered us that money as an annual bonus for

conserving and protecting our territory, but it was completely false," Mr Guasico was quoted as saying by the New York Times.

New 'Country'

Nithyananda had a large following in India before he was arrested in connection with a sex scandal in 2010. Reports had said that after fleeing India in 2019 following sexual assault allegations, he had bought an island off the coast of Ecuador, another South American country. 'Kailasa', Nithyananda and his followers announced on YouTube, was dedicated to the "preservation, restoration and revival of an enlightened culture and civilisation based on authentic Hinduism".

Nithyananda had said that his new status as the head of a state granted him immunity. In 2023, representatives of 'Kailasa' had attended a United Nations meeting and demanded protection for the "supreme pontiff of Hinduism".

The meeting of United Nations

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) was held in Geneva and videos showed one of the representatives - a woman in a saree wearing a turban - extolling the sustainable development initiatives taken by her 'country'.

She also claimed Nithyananda has been targeted for reviving the ancient traditions of Hinduism and was banned from his birth country and asked the UN body what measures can be taken "at national and international levels" to stop his persecution. Nithyananda is known for his quotable quotes, many of which are shared widely and often mocked on social media. "So the me resides in this as me is residing in all of that as me so that me through this me talking to me," the self-styled godman had famously said.

"I am going to be active, healthy at least for the next 150 years. The Hindu enemies and Hindu traitors wasted a lot of my time and I don't go and attack them or react to them... I just decide to live longer," he had said.

Fraud 2.0 ? Kerala CM's Daughter Accused in Rs 2.7 Crore Cyber Scam

The financial fraud case involving Cochin Minerals and Rutile Ltd (CMRL) has taken a dramatic turn, with the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) naming Veena Vijayan, daughter of Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, as an accused. The agency has filed a detailed chargesheet, alleging that her company, Exalogic Solutions Pvt Ltd, fraudulently received Rs 2.7 crore without providing any actual services. Reports confirm that the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has sanctioned prosecution against Veena Vijayan and other accused individuals based on the SFIO's findings. The investigation revealed that Exalogic Solutions was paid for IT and marketing-related services that were never rendered. The fraudulent transactions were allegedly routed through two companies—Nipuna Inter-



national Private Limited and Sasja India Private Limited. Along with Veena Vijayan, the chargesheet also names Exalogic Solutions, CMRL's Managing Director Sasidharan Kartha, CMRL it-

self, and a sister company. The SFIO has invoked multiple sections of the Companies Act, 2013, with the most serious charge being under Section 447, which deals with fraud and car-

ries a potential jail term of up to 10 years along with a fine of up to three times the fraud amount. Additionally, charges have been framed under Section 448 (false statements), Section 129 (financial statements), and Section 134 (board's report and disclosures) against the accused. The Kerala High Court had recently dismissed petitions seeking a probe into corruption allegations against CM Pinarayi Vijayan and Veena Vijayan related to the CMRL issue. These petitions had earlier challenged a vigilance court's decision that refused to initiate an investigation. As the SFIO intensifies its crackdown on financial irregularities, the case is expected to create a political storm in Kerala. The legal proceedings ahead could have far-reaching consequences for those involved.

FEMA Case: ED seizes ₹22-cr worth of immovable assets of Rana Sugars

The Enforcement Directorate has seized immovable properties worth ₹22.02 crore of Rana Sugars Limited under section 37A of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999, for holding foreign exchange outside India.

The firm is owned and managed by Kapurthala MLA Rana Gurjit Singh and his son and Sultanpur Lodhi MLA Inder Pratap Singh Rana, who is managing director and promoter of RSL, and other family members as chairman and promoters. The ED spokesperson stated that the federal agency initiated an investigation under the provisions of FEMA, 1999 against Rana Sug-

ars Ltd, its promoters, Directors & others in connection with the issuance of Global Depository Receipts (GDRs) and non-utilisation of



entire GDR proceeds for its intended bona-fide purpose. ED investigation revealed that out of total GDR receipts, M/s Rana Sugars Ltd did not repatriate entire GDR proceeds to India and held GDR proceeds to the tune of USD 2.56 million (₹22.02 crore) outside India in contravention of section 4 of FEMA, 1999. "Further investigation is under progress," it stated. Last year, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) imposed a penalty of ₹63 crore on Rana Sugar Limited (RSL) on the alleged charges of diversion of funds to its conduit and individual entities.

Why Russia, Canada and these countries were not part of Trump's tariff hit list

US President Donald Trump's latest round of reciprocal tariffs has hit multiple countries hard, with rates ranging from 10% to as high as 50%. However, some nations—Russia, Canada, Mexico, North Korea, and Cuba—were left out of the list.

The exclusion has raised eyebrows, especially as major trade partners like India (27%), the European Union (20%), and Vietnam (46%) have been slapped with hefty duties. So why were these countries spared?

Russia, North Korea, Cuba, and Belarus were also not included in Trump's latest tariff list.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that Russia was not included in the tariff list because the US does not trade with Russia as it is under sanctions that make trade with the US minimal.

While Canada and Mexico weren't included in Trump's April 2 tariff announcement, it doesn't mean they've escaped

trade penalties altogether. The US had already imposed a 25% tariff on imports from both countries earlier this year, with a lower 10% rate on Canadian energy and potash.

Additionally, goods entering the US under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) remain exempt from these new duties. However, auto parts and other products will face new levies starting Thursday.

"We are going to fight these tariffs with countermeasures. We are going to protect our workers," Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney told Bloomberg.

Mexico is also preparing a response. President Claudia Sheinbaum is expected to address the issue in a press conference on Thursday.

"These countries already face extremely high tariffs and our previously imposed sanctions preclude any meaningful trade with them," the official said.

Saurav Ghosh, co-founder, Jiraaf- a

bond investment platform, pointed out another possible reason for Russia's exemption: ongoing negotiations between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Given the existing sanctions on Russia, the trade between the US and Russia had already come down," Ghosh said. "Moreover, if President Trump is still negotiating with President Putin on ending the Ukraine war, he would need a supportive Russia."

It also remains unclear whether Trump will modify his stance on countries buying Russian oil and gas.

Trump's new tariff strategy appears to be aimed at nations with a high trade surplus with the US. China, which recorded a \$295 billion surplus with the US in 2024, has been hit with a 34% tariff.

"Asian countries have a higher trade deficit with the US along with the EU, so it is natural that they are higher on

the list," Ghosh explained. "Further, President Trump said that non-tariff barriers, including domestic VAT and unfair currency rates, have played a part in determining reciprocal tariffs. It seems that driving trade balance has been the key criteria rather than any other underlying calculation."

One of the biggest surprises in Trump's tariff list, according to Ghosh, was the aggressive stance against Japan (24%) and Vietnam (46%).

"The most surprising element is the strong tariff on Japan and Vietnam," he said.

With Trump's tariffs already shaking up global trade, more countries could retaliate. Canada and Mexico are weighing their responses, while Asian and European nations are bracing for impact. For now, Russia and North Korea are out of Trump's crosshairs—but that could change depending on how diplomatic ties unfold in the coming months.

Madhya Pradesh: Man crawls to government office with string of complaints to highlight water woes

A man from Madhya Pradesh's Sehore district attached several written applications to a string tied to his body and crawled to the divisional commissioner's office to highlight water "shortage" in his village.

Bishankhedi resident Bajrangi told reporters on Wednesday that he resorted to the unusual method as accessing water is a huge challenge in his village, a claim contested by the authorities.

"I have arrived here for water. I had submitted applications to the collector, minister and the chief minister to highlight the water crisis in the village. When nothing happened, I came here with a trail of complaints," he said. Bajrangi also accused his village sarpanch of stalling efforts to resolve the problem and indulging in corruption.

He claimed that water scarcity is so acute that people, especially women,

are forced to carry water in just a lota for nature's call.

However, officials in the district disagreed with Bajrangi's claims.

Public Health Engineering department's executive engineer, Pradeep Saxena, told reporters on Thursday that officials visited Bishankhedi on Wednesday and found that there was a water shortage near the community centre.

An alternative arrangement was made

there by digging a borewell, he said. Water is being stored in a tank by installing a pump in this borewell, the official said.

The village has a population of 2,100, and it has 20 hand pumps, of which 12 are functional, the official said.

According to Saxena, most houses in the village have their own water source from which even other villagers get water.

This is not the first time MP witnessed an unusual protest by citizens to highlight their plights.

Last July, an elderly farmer rolled on the floor of the collectorate in Mandsaur district, claiming that no action had been taken on his complaint of alleged land grabbing.

In December 2024, a farmer, his wife and three children walked on their knees at the sub-divisional magistrate's office complex in Khategaon town in Dewas district to raise their problem due to a land dispute.

The farmer, Lakshaman, claimed that his representations to the authorities had yielded no results. However, the then SDM said the farmer had lost his land dispute case against a neighbour in a court and it was not possible for them to intervene in the matter directly. The tehsildar and patwari were, however, instructed to find a way out on humanitarian grounds.

ED uncovers George Soros-backed funding routes to Indian NGOs

The Enforcement Directorate has uncovered financial transactions linking billionaire philanthropist George Soros's Soros Economic Development Fund (SEDF) to the NGO sector in India, raising concerns over possible violations of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) norms. Investigators have found that SEDF, the social impact investment arm of the Open Society Institute (OSI), provided funds to three Indian companies—Rootbridge Services Pvt Ltd (RSPL), Rootbridge Academy Pvt Ltd (RAPL), and ASAR Social Impact Advisors Pvt Ltd (ASAR)—under the pretext of foreign direct investment (FDI) or consultancy/service fees. These companies received approximately Rs 25 crore between 2020-2021 and 2023-2024, despite OSI being under the scrutiny of the Home Ministry

since May 2016 for "undesirable activities." Since then, OSI has required prior government approval to send funds to FCRA-registered organisations in India. According to the ED's findings, RSPL alone received Rs 18.64 crore from SEDF through Compulsorily Convertible Preference Shares (CCPS), valued at an inflated Rs 2.5-2.6 lakh per share based on the Discounted Cash Flow method. Authorities suspect this was a "colourable arrangement" to bypass FCRA restrictions, as SEDF is barred from directly donating to NGOs in India without Home Ministry approval. Similarly, RAPL, a company incorporated in 2019 to provide fundraising services for non-profits, received Rs 2.70 crore as "commission agent services" from SEDF. However, the ED noted that RAPL had not actually provided any services in return, suggesting

it acted as a conduit to circumvent FCRA regulations. ASAR, established in 2016 and engaged in public engagement, research, and capacity building for NGOs, received Rs 2.91 crore from SEDF as service fees. The ED has flagged this as another attempt to funnel disguised donations to Indian NGOs under the guise of payments for service exports.

THE MAURITIUS CONNECTION

The ED probe traced OSI-linked investments to Aspada Investment Company (AIC), a Mauritius-based entity that allegedly funnelled funds into India. The probe found that Aspada Investment Advisors Pvt Ltd (AIAPL), incorporated in Bengaluru in 2013, managed and advised SEDF's investments in India, which amounted to over Rs 300 crore across 12 companies.

ED attaches Rs 115.86 crore assets in National Spot Exchange laundering case

The ED probe has revealed that the accused hatched a criminal conspiracy to defraud the investors and induced them to trade on the NSEL platform



The Enforcement Directorate has provisionally attached immovable assets valued at Rs 115.86 crore in the National Spot Exchange Limited (NSEL) money laundering case.

These assets include 15 immovable properties situated in Mumbai, Delhi and Rajasthan belonging to various defaulters of NSEL - Mohan India Group, Vimladevi Agrotech Ltd, Yathuri Associates and Lotus Refineries.

So far, properties totalling Rs 3433.06 crore have been attached in the case.

Seven prosecution complaints have been filed in this case against NSEL, various defaulters and broking entities. The central agency initiated the investigation on the basis of FIRs registered under various sections of the Indian Penal Code. The ED probe has revealed that the accused hatched a criminal conspiracy to defraud the investors, induced them to trade on the NSEL platform, created forged documents like bogus warehouse receipts, and falsified accounts. The ED said the accused defrauded investors to the tune of Rs 5,600 crore. The probe has revealed that the genuine investors were defrauded of their investments through misappropriation, which is apparent from the fact that NSEL allowed the trading of commodities by sellers, without ensuring that goods of appropriate quantity and quality were stored in the exchange-controlled warehouses. It resulted in thousands of investors trading in non-existent goods. It was also found that the amount collected from various investors was diverted by the trading members (defaulters) of NSEL for other activities like investment in real estate, and repayment of outstanding debts. Earlier this year, the ED filed a chargesheet against 19 broking entities and their directors. The agency said the broking companies allegedly colluded with NSEL officials to attract investors to trade on the NSEL platform.

Pension rules updates: 8 RBI guidelines every pensioner must know

If a bank accidentally credits more pension than it should to a pensioner, then the bank must consult the Pension Sanctioning Authority before recovering the extra money.

Receiving your pension on time is not just a right – it's a lifeline for countless retired government employees, who receive their pensions through schemes set by the central and state governments. These payments are processed by authorised banks, which must follow the Reserve Bank of India's "Master Circular - Disbursement of Government Pension by Agency Banks".

Recently, the RBI updated its guidelines in the Master Circular, clarifying a few key points pensioners should be aware of. Let us look into some of them.

UPDATION OF DEARNESS RELIEF (DR)

Whenever the government increases the rate of dearness relief, banks are expected to update the pension amount and pay the revised sum to the pensioners accordingly. The RBI mandates that banks determine revised DR payments either by receiving government directives via mail, fax, or email, or by referring to relevant government websites.

SUBMISSION OF LIFE CERTIFICATE

Pensioners do not need to visit a bank to submit their life certificate. They can do it digitally using the Jeevan Pramaan portal, but only if the Pension Sanctioning Authority is also registered on the platform.



EXTRA HELP FOR SUPER SENIORS AND THE UNWELL

The RBI has directed banks to facilitate life certificate submission at the homes or premises of super senior citizens who are over 70 years old or have a serious illness or disability including vision problems.

SUPPORT FOR SICK PENSIONERS

If a pensioner is bedridden or unable to sign forms, banks can send an officer (preferably from the same branch) to their home. The officer will help with withdrawal forms or cheques in the presence of two witnesses – one of whom must be a trustworthy bank

employee.

FAMILY PENSION

In case a pensioner passes away, the family pension will be credited to the same account, provided the spouse is listed in the Pension Payment Order (PPO). There's no need for the surviving spouse to open a fresh account. This reduces paperwork during already tough times.

IN CASE EXTRA PENSION IS CREDITED

If a bank accidentally credits more pension than it should, it must consult the Pension Sanctioning Authority before recovering the extra money. But if the mistake is the bank's fault, the excess amount should be returned

to the government right away—without troubling the pensioner.

BANKS MUST GIVE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT SLIPS

Whenever you submit your life certificate, the bank must give you a signed acknowledgement slip. If you're submitting it digitally, they can provide a digital receipt too. This helps keep track and avoids confusion later.

GET PAID FOR DELAYS

If your pension or arrears are paid late, banks must compensate you with interest at 8% per year from the due date and this money should be directly credited to your account.

"Doing Surya Namaskar, walking a little...": Kareena Kapoor Khan dismisses the idea of botox

While many actresses have gone under the knife to enhance their looks, Bollywood star Kareena Kapoor Khan prefers to stay away from cosmetic surgeries.

At a launch event for nutritionist Rutuja Diwekar's book 'The Commonsense Diet', in Mumbai, Kareena emphasised ageing gracefully and naturally rather than relying on skin treatments such as botox.

"Age is just a number. My only thing is I always want to be fit to take on whatever old age brings. I want to be able to do what I have to do whether it has to go to sets at 70, 75. I want to keep working until 85, all my life. I want to be able to bend to pick up my grandchildren. I want to be able to do things and not be

dependent on someone or a stick," Kareena said.

"For that, I have to eat right, and have mobility to work out. It's not about the way I look, it's about the way I feel and that's what for me, aging and life is. I am embracing it but I'm taking all these particular things, like eating ghee, eating khichdi, doing a little bit of weight training for muscle strength, walking a little, my Surya Namaskars, doing my little work on my own rather than skin treatments and botox," she added. Meanwhile, on the professional front, Kareena recently captivated the audience with her appearance at the gala celebrating 25 years of Lakme Fashion Week.

Reflecting on her fashion journey, she recalled walking the ramp at different stages of her

life, from her size-zero days to her pregnancy with son Taimur.

During the event, Kareena said, "I do everything with my heart. So, whether it was walking the ramp when I was size-zero or walking the ramp with Taimur in my belly, or whether it was, you know, size 10 or 12, that never really mattered. What mattered was my heart....my heart was on stage..was with each and every designer that I walked for was also in my confidence. Thank you Lakme for having me..I enjoyed my time."

Kareena, who has been the face of Lakme for many years, walked the ramp for eminent designers at the Lakme Fashion Week and also announced her renewed association with the brand.



Who should pay on the first date?



Most of us are attuned to paying whenever we go out for a date. But with the rules of dating changing and women wanting to be in charge in various situations, it sometimes becomes tricky to decode who will pay for the dinner on your first few dates. So here are few things you can follow to avoid that a awkward situation:

Go to an informal and affordable place

This works almost all the times. The very fact that the restaurant you go to is not too expensive and has a causal air to it, will keep you more relaxed. And paying the bill will not

be an issue since it will not hamper your pockets. On the other hand, even if the girl offers to pay, it won't be too harsh on the guy's part to let the girl handle the expensive dinner.

Think you're the one paying the bill

Be ready to pay unless the girl really insists to pay. Many a times, there are formal efforts to show they are willing to pay, but you should go ahead with splitting the bill or letting her pay only if she insists a second or third time. In such cases, it is better to let her do the formality as it might just work in your favor.



US Influencer Leaves "Miserable" Marriage After Rs 9 Lakh Nose Job Boosts Her Confidence

Devyn Aiken, a 30-year-old from Philadelphia, had a rhinoplasty costing Rs 9.1 lakh (\$11,000) in November to tackle her "biggest insecurity." This surgery increased her confidence and marked a pivotal moment, enabling her to end a seven-year unhappy marriage, the New York Post reported.

"I feel incredibly sexy," Ms Aiken told The Post. "My new nose gave me the push I needed to finally choose myself and walk away from a marriage that made me miserable."

The decision to undergo rhinoplasty was life-changing. Just weeks after the surgery, she filed for divorce in December. A video documenting her transformation has since amassed over 4.5 million views on TikTok, with users praising her striking new look.

"I wake up feeling so much happier," she said, describing the "glow-up" that came with both the surgery and her newfound independence. "I get to spend the rest of my life feeling this way."



Ms Aiken's journey reflects broader trends. Research shows that 82% of divorced individuals experience a renewed sense of confidence and inner peace after ending their marriages. Many, like Aiken, also embrace makeovers as a symbol of their fresh start. Growing up, Ms Aiken endured relentless bullying over her prominent nose, with classmates cruelly calling her "witch," "toucan," and "Pinocchio." Struggling with self-esteem, she settled into a marriage at 23 without truly understanding her partner.

"We got married too soon and didn't really know each other," she admitted.

Though her ex-husband loved her natural features, their relationship was filled with arguments, and they often felt out of sync.

Her turning point came when she decided to have surgery with Philadelphia-based plastic surgeon Dr. Mark Ginsburg. The nearly six-hour procedure marked the beginning of a new chapter.

"It changed everything," Ms Aiken said. "During my recovery, I had time to reflect, and I realized- I need to go through with this divorce so I can move forward."

Now, she's embracing life with confidence. "I'm dating, exclusively dating, and having so much fun," she shared.

Ms Aiken has also found a supportive online community, with many comparing her new look to celebrities like Bella Hadid and Celine Dion. She hopes her transformation-inside and out-inspires others to take control of their happiness.

From hempseed gruel to CBD: curious history of cannabis as health product

With the global CBD market valued at USD 19 billion in 2023 and projected to grow by 16 per cent annually until 2030, looking back at the broader, problematic history of commercial cannabis should serve as a cautionary tale.



The cannabis-derived product CBD has been hailed "the wonder drug of our age", offering potential health benefits without the high.

From juices and coffee to truffles and ice cream, CBD products have flooded the market for consumers looking for an answer to health problems from anxiety to insomnia.

But with CBD products in the UK and EU falling under "novel foods" regulations rather than pharmaceutical standards, they aren't subjected to the same rigorous safety and quality controls as drugs.

The UK's Committee on Toxicology

has even flagged potential health risks, such as liver injury, leading the Food Standards Agency to issue safety guidance.

The regulatory gaps and health concerns of today reflect those of the 19th century when cannabis products were commercialised by the food industry.

In the 1830s, William Brooke O'Shaughnessy, an Irish doctor, discovered that cannabis was effective in treating muscle spasms and stomach cramps. French psychiatrist Jacques-Joseph Moreau later explored its potential for mental illness. This led

many 19th-century doctors to champion cannabis as a cure-all.

It wasn't long before patent medicine manufacturers began using cannabis as a common ingredient in their formulas. But soon, cannabis wasn't just in pharmacies – it was in food.

Surprisingly, this shift was not driven by the food industry, but by the free church environment in Sweden as part of efforts to combat tuberculosis – a leading cause of death across all social classes in the country at the time.

Paul Petter Waldenstrom, leader of the Swedish Mission Covenant, wrote a letter to Svenska Morgonbladet about a woman reportedly cured of tuberculosis by a homebrewed gruel made with hempseed, rye flour and milk.

His endorsement helped popularise the remedy, and many started making their own "Waldenstrom gruel", as it became known. Sensing a business opportunity, entrepreneur J. Barthelson developed a powdered commercial version with the elegant French name *Extrait Cannabis*.

He marketed it as a dietary remedy for tuberculosis, chest diseases and low

energy. As demand grew, competitors quickly jumped on the bandwagon, using fearmongering tactics to persuade consumers that they were putting their lives at risk without it.

The rise and fall of Maltos-Cannabis

The most striking cannabis-infused product of the era came from the Red Cross Technical Factory. Their "health drink", Maltos-Cannabis, was a maltose and cannabis blend marketed as both nutritious and delicious, especially when mixed with cocoa.

With an aggressive advertising campaign, the company raked in nearly SEK 290,000 a year (around 775,000 pounds in modern money), opening factories in Chicago, Helsinki, Brussels and Utrecht.

A particularly dramatic advertisement depicted the Grim Reaper fleeing from the light of science, shining from a lighthouse.

Meanwhile, a mother and daughter raised their arms triumphantly, symbolising victory over death thanks to Maltos-Cannabis. The tagline boldly claimed that the product had "a big future".



Trump is right: Everyone will remember the day he launched a total trade war

By Stephen Collinson

Donald Trump just took the greatest political gamble with the US economy of any modern president.

Presidents normally try to do everything they can to avoid upsetting the country's economic engine and global stability — especially if unemployment is low and growth is ticking over, as it was when he took over from Joe Biden.

But with his stunning outburst of new tariffs on almost all imports from 185 nations, Trump administered an extraordinary shock that went against the advice of almost every economic expert and the lessons from some of history's grimmest omens.

He went with a lifelong belief in the mystical power of making imported goods uncompetitive to boost domestic production. No matter that trade wars tend to end badly and that tariffs are more a feature of the 19th century than the 21st.

In a surreal appearance in the White House Rose Garden Wednesday, Trump clung onto a big poster that showed new tariff rates as it swayed in the

wind. The world saw an unrestrained president in the sole spotlight he adores, hazarding the economic fates of billions of people with an outlandish political bet. The biggest political surprise is that Trump — in the name of reviving the economic prospects of post-industrial regions ravaged by the loss of jobs and factories abroad — is about to inflict real pain on Americans.

He was elected five months ago in large part because voters were frustrated at high prices for groceries and housing after grinding inflation inflicted by Covid-19 and after the Biden administration's spending helped overheat the economy. Democratic nominee Kamala Harris had few good answers when asked how she'd cut prices. But Trump projected blue-collar solidarity by working the fries station at a Pennsylvania McDonalds.

Yet he's gone all-in on a policy that will make almost everything people buy — from fast food to electronics, cars to new homes — pricier. Poorer people will get hurt more than Trump's rich friends, as will those

who live on fixed incomes and can't bear to look at their plunging 401ks.

He told NBC at the weekend that he "couldn't care less" if the cost of buying cars shoots up. His new tariff experiment suggests that he means it. It's a staggering piece of political positioning for a billionaire president who heads a Cabinet of fellow billionaires and millionaires.

Foreign nations sure to hit back

No one can predict exactly how this gambit will play out.

Assuming the full range of tariffs are implemented and there are no last minute opt-outs — a possibility that can't be ignored given Trump's past reversals — the world is set for a full-scale trade war.

Foreign leaders are as subject to political factors as Trump is. And they will be under fierce pressure to hit back at the US for a universal tariff of 10% on almost all nations, plus much higher rates for nations he said are the worst offenders.

It's hard to think of a more loyal US ally than Australia. But its Prime Minister Anthony Albanese warned, "This is not the

act of a friend." Foreign reprisals could set up an escalation ladder and make Trump — who always wants to get the last word — feel he's got no option but to respond.

The president didn't explain why it made sense for the world's mightiest economy to launch a trade war with tiny, troubled nations like Cambodia with a 49% tariff. Or why it's a good idea to make life even harder for developing countries in Africa. And is he really going to wage economic fights with penguins? The White House tariff list included the tiny Heard and McDonald Islands in Antarctica which are getting hit with a 10% tariff — despite being little more than a haven for seabirds.

The other great political risk from his new approach — which obliterates the free trade global system the United States spent decades building — is that it's unlikely Trump will get a short-term political payoff from his wager.

Many analysts believe that it's a fantasy that manufacturers will decide to build new factories and supply chains in the US as Trump promises they will. But

even if they did, the chances of it happening during his term — or even in the third term he's teasing despite constitutional prohibitions — are very slim.

While the tariffs will raise hundreds of billions of dollars for the US Treasury, it's unclear whether voters will buy into his claim that they will all get compensated for higher prices — an effective new tax — in his promised tax cut bill. And all signs point to a measure, if it passes, that proportionally favors the very rich.

A test of Trump's brand as defiant businessman

There is no doubting the audacity of Trump's big declaration of "Liberation Day" on Wednesday.

For weeks, he's made tariff threats and then suggested he'd pull back. His supporters on Capitol Hill voiced the familiar trope that his bluster represented the master chess moves of an unbeatable deal maker. But barring a reversal that would turn into a major political climbdown, given his choreographing of a "historic" turning point for America, Trump is not blinking this time.

Everything is blowing up in Elon Musk's face

By Allison Morrow

All it took was losing \$100 billion in three months to make Elon Musk change his tune on government work.

ICYMI: The last 24 hours have brought a parade of humiliation for the world's richest edgelord, starting with his \$20 million losing bet on the pro-Trump candidate for the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Hours after the loss in Wisconsin, Tesla reported its biggest sales drop ever, falling 13% in the first quarter, while its No. 1 rival grew revenue by 60% in the same time period. Then came a Politico report quoting MAGA insiders who say that Musk has overstayed his welcome in Washington.

The White House on Wednesday called the Politico report "garbage," and Musk dismissed it as "fake news" in social media post. But the administration confirmed that Musk is expected to wrap up his stint as Trump's hatchet man in late May or June, when his 130 days as a "special government employee" comes to an end. That was enough to reverse a 6% decline in Tesla shares — a sign investors are



optimistic that Musk will ditch the cheese-hat shenanigans and focus on his company's rapidly shrinking market share (and maybe, possibly, deliver on his long-delayed promises to revolutionize autonomous driving.) In short: Voters, customers, investors and the MAGA elite say the Elon Musk show has lost the plot.

Musk has shed more than a quarter of his total net worth since January as Tesla shares have tanked. He remains the world's richest person by a country mile with \$323 billion — second-placer Jeff Bezos is still more than \$100 billion behind.

Because Musk is both the public face of Tesla and its biggest individual shareholder, when one

suffers, the other suffers in kind. Musk's alliance with the far right has torched Tesla's brand in the eyes of what used to be the carmaker's base: upwardly mobile eco-conscious lefties from the coasts. It was never clear how Musk planned to replace those customers with folks from red states who have long resisted EV adoption. So far, various

attempts to stem the bleeding have only made things worse.

A live Tesla sales pitch with Trump on the South Lawn reeked of desperation. The Commerce secretary's urging of regular Americans to buy Tesla shares, similarly, fell flat. And the FBI threatening to prosecute Tesla vandals as domestic terrorists — a wild re-imagining of the meaning of "terrorism," according to legal experts — only reinforced the sense of desperation around the brand.

But the ultimate rebuke came from voters. Musk tried to use his virtually infinite money to influence the Wisconsin race, and even showed up in a giant cheese hat at a rally in Green Bay, during which he handed out two \$1 million checks to voters in a stunt that faced an immediate legal challenge.

His effort backfired, and the state court retained its 4-3 liberal majority. Bottom line: Money can buy a lot of things, but not all things. And with Tesla's continued sales drop, Musk is getting a harsh reminder that he's not the only one who can wield a pocketbook to send a message.

An Unceremonious End to Modi's Smart Cities Mission



By P. Raman

We will build 100 smart cities outfitted with high-tech communication capabilities, Narendra Modi had thundered, a month after taking office as prime minister on May 26, 2014.

"Cities in the past were built on riverbanks," Modi said. "They are now built along highways. But in the future, they will be built based on availability of optical fibre networks and next-generation infrastructure."

He announced an investment of \$1.2 billion over the following year in what was said to be the world's largest infrastructure

project, with more funds to come from private sources and abroad.

In his budget speech, Modi's finance minister Arun Jaitley gave details. Most of these new cities would be satellite towns around large cities, he said, and announced incentives for foreign investors.

Those were the days when Modi was coming up with attractive plans that the media lapped up without scrutiny. 'Smart Cities' was hailed as the best of Modi's visions for modern India. For the middle classes, Modi became a hero and his 'smart cities' the

potential centres of career opportunities.

Real estate investors, foreign suppliers, and global technology and IT firms saw more alluring business opportunities in the Smart Cities mission than in the Make-in-India project, another failed initiative. By mid-2015, 14 countries, including France, US, China, Sweden, Israel, Germany, Brazil and Singapore, had expressed interest. They were looking at major investments in Smart Cities. A dozen international institutions, such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and USAID, offered support. PricewaterhouseCoopers, McKinsey, Lea Associates and Bosch were the empaneled consultants. Private firms were offered equity participation and the right to impose 'user charges'. Contractors were salivating at the prospects of a 7-lakh-km broadband cable to link 2.5 lakh villages with accompanying facilities like WiFi boxes and gear. It was a huge

pie. France's Thales perceived a Rs 3,300-crore market for 'integrated solutions' and 'added value systems'.

Then, suddenly, a deafening silence fell all over. Private and foreign investors were not forthcoming, their investments not matching their initial interest. The financial burden on the government would be huge. The grapevine has it that someone in government — the rumour is Arun Jaitley — managed to convince Modi that his dream project was economically disastrous, technologically unsustainable and politically unwise. Citing the experience of other countries, they argued that technology was ever changing and today's WiFi might soon be replaced by a better system. So, it would need constant updating to keep the cities 'smart'. Politically, the ruling party might soon be charged with wasting resources on elitist and pro-rich projects while large sections lived in slums.

Ultimately, the government decided to retain the

nomenclature but with a changed goal. The Smart Cities Mission would be confined to renovating and retrofitting existing cities and providing such facilities as housing, clean water, power and transport. All the schemes would be managed by the high-sounding special purpose vehicles (SPV), which are private companies or private-public-participation ventures.

The Smart Cities Mission borrowed heavily from Manmohan Singh's Jawaharlal Nehru National Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and its four sub-missions. Modi's mission also overlaps the existing Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY-U), National Urban Learning Platform (NLUP), and Housing for All 2022.

Originally, the Smart Cities Mission was scheduled to conclude its present phase by 2020, but extensions were granted because of hurdles in implementation.



China fishes in Myanmar's wide faultlines

By maintaining relations with Myanmar's ethnic armed organisations, China exerts influence on whoever rules the country. Its strategic interest lies in overland access to the Indian Ocean

By Pradip Phanjoubam

The Myanmar civil war, triggered by the February 2021 military coup, has crossed the four-year mark. There is, however, still no sign of a respite from the anarchy the country is in. Adding to the country's misery now is the devastating earthquake last week, the death toll from which has already exceeded 2,000 and is expected to climb much higher.

The devastation from the quake will understandably divert international attention from the civil war for now. But in the days ahead, the tragedy will probably accentuate the acute divisions this country of multiple ethnicities is cursed with, when it becomes evident that the government does not have the means to mitigate public misery from the calamity. The country's economy is already stressed to breaking point by the civil war, and therefore it will have to depend on the generosity of the international community to overcome the new challenge. It remains to be seen if politics colours the response and how

many countries get to set aside their disapproval of the junta to extend humanitarian aid.

One scenario is almost predictable. China will be among the most indiscriminate in offering help to the junta, not for any particular liking of the latter, as often alleged, but to ensure its deep interest and matching investments in the country are not upset. It is for this that China has always made it very clear that it will ally with anybody in power in Myanmar. Indeed, when Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy or NLD was in power after the 2015 election, China had also rolled out the red carpet for Suu Kyi.

China has also not abandoned other backup plans in case its Plan A of winning the confidence of whichever party is in power runs into rough weather. This is clear from the influence it cultivates and maintains on several powerful ethnic armed organisations or EAOs, especially in the Shan and Kachin states bordering China. This fine strategic balance was seen at play in the manner China

brokered a ceasefire between the junta and the Three Brotherhood Alliance, an alliance of three EAOs in Shan which had inflicted some serious reverses on the junta.

These three EAOs are the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army of the Kokang people, Ta'ang National Liberation Army of the Ta'ang people, and the Arakan Army of the Rakhine people. The picture is clear. China's influence over Myanmar's many EAOs has been an effective bargaining chip in its quest to partner with the party in power.

It may be recalled that China was also one of the prime movers behind the nationwide ceasefire agreement in the country on October 15, 2015—a month before the general election which saw the return of Suu Kyi's NLD to power. Of the 15 EAOs invited, only eight ultimately agreed to sign the pact; two more joined next February, again under China's influence.

But aligning with the party in power, especially during a civil

war, must have to be a delicate balancing act, for it can generate negative sentiments among those opposed to the regime, directed at whoever makes such a move. China is already sensing this to a considerable extent.

Reports indicate that China's pressure was again a factor in coup leader General Min Aung Hlaing, the current chairman of the junta's state administrative council, deciding to fix Myanmar's next election this December. The hope is it will bring back a certain degree of legitimacy to the country's government, and therefore a return to peace and political stability.

It is quite obvious: a Myanmar in anarchy hurts China's interest. But a splintered Myanmar where it would then have to deal with several statelets to protect its interest cannot but come across as a diplomatic and strategic nightmare. This is especially so considering the possibility that some or several of the new states may not be favourably disposed to it and may become the entry points

for rival powers opposed to it.

China's interest goes much beyond the resources Myanmar offers directly—copper, jade, rare earths and hydroelectric power, to name just a few. It already has an oil and gas pipeline from Myanmar's Kyaukphyu deep-sea port in Rakhine state to Yunan province, directly transporting crude oil and natural gas. The interest is also about land access to the Indian Ocean, and from there to Africa, where its investment is expanding, and the oil-rich Arabian peninsula. This anxiety is often described as China's Malacca Strait dilemma, which currently is its only and winding sea route to the Indian Ocean. Not all the countries around this strait come under China's sphere of control. With its rivalry with India unlikely to de-escalate in the near future, Pakistan and Myanmar remain China's most viable land routes to the Indian Ocean. While both these countries have friendly ties with China, Myanmar is the preferred route.

Reese Witherspoon announces 'Legally Blonde' prequel 'Elle', check out first look“

Fans of 'Legally Blonde' have exciting news to celebrate! Reese Witherspoon has shared the first look at Lexi Minetree as Elle Woods in Elle, a new prequel series coming to Amazon Prime Video.

Witherspoon, who played Elle Woods in the original films, took to Instagram to make the announcement.

"Harvard was hard. High school was harder. Our new series, Elle, is now in production! Couldn't be more excited to introduce you all to @leximinetree as Elle Woods," read her Instagram post. According to Variety, the show will take viewers back to Elle Woods' high school days, giving fans a glimpse of the experiences that shaped her into the confident and determined woman fans loved in Legally Blonde. Meanwhile, shooting for the series has just begun, reported Variety.

Lexi Minetree, who is often seen in small roles such as in 'Law & Order: SVU' and 'The Murdaugh Murders', is set to take

on her first lead role as young Elle Woods. The cast also includes Tom Everett Scott as Elle's father and June Diane Raphael as her mother.

Laura Kittrell and Caroline Dries serve as co-showrunners, with Witherspoon also involved as an executive producer. The series is produced by Amazon MGM and Witherspoon's company, Hello Sunshine.

The Legally Blonde franchise first began in 2001 with the hit film starring Witherspoon. It became a pop culture favorite, which later led to a sequel, a Broadway musical, and now a prequel series.



*I think being called "slave" is a bigger curse word: Akshay Kumar on saying F**K You in Kesari Chapter 2*

Akshay Kumar and R Madhavan, along with the other cast members and crew, launched the trailer of their upcoming film 'Kesari: Chapter 2' in a grand event on Thursday in the national capital.

At the trailer launch, superstar Akshay Kumar opened up about saying 'F*** You' on the screen as shown in the power-packed teaser of the film.

At the press conference of the film, when Akshay was asked about what made him say the curse word, the actor justified it by saying that being called a slave by Britishers is a much bigger abuse than what he said.

"Haan maine yeh word use kiya. Lekin woh jo word usne use kiya tha (for Britishers in the teaser) 'You are still a slave!' - was that not a gaali for you? I think usse bade gaali aur kuchh ho nahi sakti (I think there can be no bigger abuse than this). I would have been happy if you had said something about using the word 'slave' rather than you talking about me saying f**k you," Akshay Kumar said.

He further said that shooting Britishers for calling Indians slaves would have also been a 'less'

response at that time.

"Mere hisaab se agar aise time pe hum logon ne goli bhi maar di hoti na toh bhi chhota rehta. (According to me, if at that time we would have shot them, then that it would have also been a small response.)" added Akshay Kumar.

The trailer launch event of the film was a star-studded affair. Along with the lead actors, the event was also attended by Ananya Panday, producer Karan Johar, Apoorva Mehta and Amritpal Bindra and director Karan Singh Tyagi.

Also present at the trailer launch were the family members of late C Sankaran Nair, a courageous lawyer who challenged the British colonial regime in a legal battle for the victims of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. As per the trailer, the movie delves into the aftermath of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre which features a gripping courtroom showdown between Akshay Kumar, who portrayed Nair in the film and R Madhavan, portraying Neville McKinley, a lawyer defending the British Crown. The movie is set against the backdrop of the tragic events of April 13, 1919.



Evening Show Entertainment Hosts Grand Premiere of Sikandar in Riga, Honoring Indian Ambassador to Latvia



A grand premiere of the much-awaited Bollywood film Sikandar was held at Cinamon Kino Akropole Alfa in Riga, hosted by Darbar SIA (Evening Show Entertainment) in collaboration with Cinamon Kino. The evening was made truly special by the presence of Her Excellency Ms. Namrata Kumar, the First Resident Ambassador of India to Latvia, who attended the event as the Chief Guest along with her diplomatic team. The event marked not just the launch of a film, but a vibrant celebration of Indian culture, cinema, and the growing friendship between India and Latvia. The Ambassador graciously addressed the audience, applauding the efforts of the Indian community in Latvia, the dedication of the organizers, and the unifying power of Indian cinema in connecting people across borders.

Guests were welcomed with specially designed posters and digital screens across the cinema, creating an inviting and festive atmosphere. The Ambassador expressed her appreciation for the warm welcome, after which she was honored on stage with tokens of gratitude presented by both the Evening Show Entertainment team and Cinamon Kino. The evening was hosted by Mr. Peteris, cinema manager at Cinamon, who acknowledged the long-standing collaboration between the cinema and Evening Show Entertainment in promoting Indian films. Several notable members of the Indian diaspora and local Latvian audience graced the occasion, including Mr. Sunny Motwani, Chairman of the Indian Latvian Cultural & Economic Forum (ILCEF) and Owner of Indian Raja Restau-

rant, and Mr. Praveen Singh from Unifarma Herbals, among others. The event served as a reflection of Evening Show Entertainment's continued commitment to bringing high-quality Indian cinema to the Baltic audience. With over eight years of dedicated presence in the region, the team has successfully built the market from the ground up, driven by perseverance, resilience, and a deep connection to the community. Today, the company caters not only to Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania but also coordinates releases across CIS, Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia. This premiere stood as yet another testament to the role cinema plays in cultural diplomacy, offering a shared space for storytelling, dialogue, and celebration.

"It has been a lifelong dream": Scarlett Johansson on working in 'Jurassic World Rebirth'



Actress and singer Scarlett Johansson shared updates about 'Jurassic World Rebirth' at the CinemaCon 2025. She unveiled details, footage and never-before-seen photos in the latest installment in the Jurassic film franchise, which first kicked off more than 30 years ago with Jurassic Park. "It has been a lifelong dream to be in a Jurassic movie for the last 15 years. Each time I heard that they were making a movie, I'd reach out and you know, say 'I'm available here,' " said Johansson, noting that she was open to playing any character, reported People. The 'Jurassic World' franchise is gearing up for its next big blockbuster with the release of the first trailer for 'Jurassic World: Rebirth', scheduled to hit theatres on July 2, 2025. Directed by Gareth Edwards, 'Jurassic World: Rebirth' is based on a script by David Koepp, who wrote the original 'Jurassic Park' film, with characters created by Michael Crichton. Speaking to how he became interested in working on the film, he shared, "I suffered from a rare condition in childhood, where I was compelled to watch 'Jurassic Park' at least 10 times a year. For the longest time, I thought there was no hope of a cure until last year when I received this miraculous email with a screenplay attached," reported People. The actress appreciated the director for making the film as "realistic and authentic as pos-

sible", and shooting for the film in "real isolated locations." The director said he wanted the audience to feel like the movie is a "roller coaster ride" The film, set five years after the events of 'Jurassic World: Dominion' (2022), explores a world where Earth has become increasingly inhospitable for dinosaurs, as per the outlet. As a result, the surviving species are isolated in environments resembling those in which their breeds once thrived. A team of scientists is tasked with acquiring genetic samples from three of the planet's most colossal creatures, one from the sea, one from the land, and one from the sky. These creatures hold the potential to provide vital genetic material for a life-saving drug for humans, reported People. Starring Jonathan Bailey, Scarlett Johansson, and Mahershala Ali, the film brings a fresh dynamic to the 'Jurassic World' franchise. Johansson plays Zora Bennett, a covert operations expert on a high-stakes mission that drives the plot. The film is written by David Koepp, who also penned the screenplay for the original 1993 Steven Spielberg film, based on Michael Crichton's novel, and the 1997 sequel, The Lost World: Jurassic Park. Also presented at the CinemaCon event at Caesar's Palace were panels for Scream 7, Mission Impossible, and Fantastic Four.

Team Sikandar Lights Up Dubai Ahead of Eid Release



Under the aegis of Ferriswheel International Salman Khan, Rashmika Mandanna and A.R. Murugadoss ushered in a spectacular buzz to the UAE with drone and projection displays for Sikandar's movie promotions.

Earlier in the day, the leading cast of Sikandar visited the St Regis Hotel's beautiful observatory deck popularly known as "The View." Their next stop was at the Roxy Cinemas at JBR where fans, media and tourists gathered to catch a glimpse of Salman Khan and Rashmika Mandanna.

It was then time to witness the celebrations against the dazzling Dubai skyline.

The visual spectacle made the city of lights come alive with a unique projection on the world's tallest and largest observation wheel, AIN Dubai, located on Bluewaters Island. AIN Dubai that is a giant ferris



wheel is symbolic of the company that has brought the event to fruition, that is interestingly called Ferriswheel International. The BTS of



Sikandar visuals lit up the structure, which offers stunning 360-degree views of the city and the Arabian Gulf, creating an unforgettable cinematic moment for fans and tourists alike.

Cinemas at JBR while he wished everyone a happy Eid and said, "The love from fans in Dubai has always been overwhelming. Sikandar is very close to my heart, and I can't wait for everyone to

experience it on the big screen this Eid."

Producer Sajid Nadiadwala and Salman Khan have delivered many super hits and are reuniting for Sikandar after a decade. He was dearly missed as the event, but sending his best wishes he stated, "Dubai has always embraced Indian cinema with open arms, and there couldn't have been a better place than Dubai to celebrate Sikandar and ring in the Eid festivities ahead of its global release." Director A.R. Murugadoss adds: "It was a unique experience indeed working with Salman Khan sir and we wanted Sikandar to be grand in every sense, from the storytelling to the way we connect with audiences worldwide. Dubai felt like the perfect prelude to the global launch."

Rashmika Mandanna states,

"The energy around Sikandar is just incredible, and I'm so grateful to be part of this epic journey alongside Salman sir and Murugadoss sir. Can't wait for everyone to watch the yfilm this Eid. It's full of heart, action, and everything we love about cinema!"

Shubhra Bharadwaj, Founder and Creative Director of Ferriswheel International that has brought Sikandar to Dubai to kick start her company's presence in Dubai says, "After 30 years of events across 60 countries, this is Ferriswheel's mega project in the UAE. We are known for our unique and experiential events and who better than Salman Khan to spearhead what we stand for." The Dubai celebrations form part of a massive global rollout for Sikandar, which is set to release in 115+ countries, across 2,000+ locations and 3500+ screens, through Marudhar Entertainment and Fun Asia Films, marking the widest overseas release for a Salman Khan film to date. Sikandar releases worldwide on March 30, 2025, with select previews commencing on March 29, and promises to be the biggest Eidi for cinema lovers across the globe. Overseas release by Marudhar Entertainment and Fun Asia Films.